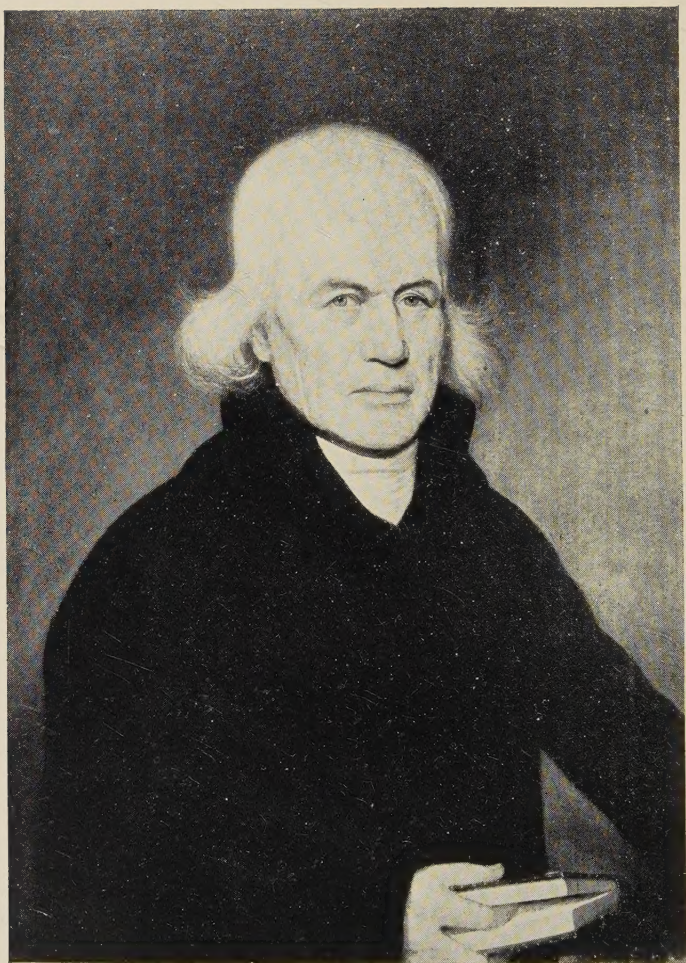


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FRANCIS ASBURY  
at Age of Sixty-three



# Francis Asbury in the Making of American Methodism

By  
H. K. CARROLL, LL.D.



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## TO THE HUMBLE ITINERANT

WHO, LIKE FRANCIS ASBURY, TRAVELED  
WIDE CIRCUITS ON HORSEBACK, OVER  
WOODLAND PATHS, MOUNTAIN TRAILS,  
AND ROUGH HIGHWAYS, ON THE HEELS  
OF PIONEER SETTLERS, TO OFFER THE  
GOSPEL OF CHRIST AS A REGENERATING  
POWER IN THE HUMAN HEART, A BIND-  
ING FORCE IN THE FAMILY, AN INCEN-  
TIVE IN THE COMMUNITY TO OBEY THE  
LAWS OF GOD AND MAN, AND A GUIDING  
MOTIVE IN THE NATION TO SEEK THE  
BLESSINGS OF CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION,  
THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY IN-  
SCRIBED BY THE AUTHOR.





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## CHAPTER I

### WHY A MONUMENT TO FRANCIS ASBURY?

**W**HAT manner of man was Francis Asbury and what was the quality of his work to deserve a monument? This honor is given sparingly in this day of great discoveries, great inventions, and great achievements, and yet no one questions the fitness of setting up a memorial to this man.

The coming of Francis Asbury to America must have seemed an insignificant event at the time. He was appointed by John Wesley as a missionary, but he was not the first, nor the chief. Joseph Pilmoor and Richard Boardman had been here two years when he came. He was called an "assistant" and was not appointed "General Assistant" to Wesley until 1783, twelve years after his arrival at Philadelphia. There was nothing in his personal appearance or known qualities to attract attention. A youth without education, except of a primitive kind; without knowledge of the original tongues of the Bible, or of theological science; without even ministerial orders, or training therefor, except in the school of a brief circuit experience, and apparently with-

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out other preparation for the work of a preacher and leader, he seemed the least likely of any of the early missionaries sent by Wesley to the American colonies to do a service for humanity that a subsequent age would gladly recognize. He had been for some years a local preacher in England, and as a local preacher he came to America. Writing thirty years later of this experience, he says, "I was exceedingly ignorant of almost everything a minister of the gospel ought to know."

Nor was he equipped with the robust health generally thought necessary to the life of a pioneer in a wilderness. Apparently undernourished and of underweight, he suffered from sickness on his long sea-journey and his *Journal* of his American experiences, on almost every page, tells of headaches and pains and illnesses, and yet he so wrought, despite the pains and penalties of bodily weakness and ailments; and he bore so patiently the troubles and trials which beset him, and the criticisms and misrepresentations which met him at every turn, that it must be conceded that he achieved the purpose of God in his coming to America. The innumerable hosts of Methodism acclaim him as father and founder and as worthy of honor.

We must conclude that with the simple purpose with which he came to America ever before



BRONZE EQUESTRIAN GROUP  
By Augustus Lukeman, Sculptor





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him, his absolute reliance on God's leadership was the hiding of his power. On his journey hither, which he was never to retrace, although he left behind father and mother, the dearest friends and the only home he was ever to know, he wrote in his *Journal*, these very simple sentences: "Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do—to gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No. I am going to live to God and to bring others so to do."

Quite commonplace and unimpressive words they seem, with little evidence of feeling, or inspiration, and scarcely of ordinary interest. But study them a little and you see in them the dominating force of a great purpose. In those days men came to America either to get money, win honor, or seek adventure. None of these aims was in the mind of Francis Asbury. Something of far greater consequence was his impelling motive: "*I go to the New World to live to God and to bring others so to do.*" He could have lived to God in England and brought others so to do, but he recognized in the New World a greater need and a greater opportunity. A new movement had begun in England, a movement which had been owned of God and which had the purest doctrines and best discipline known to him. As God had greatly blessed them in the three kingdoms, he argued, they must be pleasing

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to him. The new land was a land of need and promise. "If God does not acknowledge me in America, I will soon return to England." He never returned. He came an Englishman, he became an American, and gave his life, rich in devotion and sacrificial service, to the country of his adoption.

"To live to God and to bring others so to do"—such quiet words, with no stir of feeling, or touch of imagination, or kindling of inspiration. Plain and unattractive, like Paul's "patient continuance in well-doing," by which, commonplace as they seem, God said the crown of "eternal life" is to be won. "Patient continuance in well-doing," ever present in the mind of the Apostle to the Gentiles, must also have been constantly in the thought of Francis, the Apostle to the Americans, for that was the rule of his life. Patience under trials and disappointments; patience in sickness and suffering, patience in the weariness and discomforts of travel; patience as a guest, whether welcome or unwelcome, well served or ill served; patience under tribulation, deprivation, criticism, misunderstanding, misrepresentation; patience under the discouragements which beset him daily. He was ever learning in the school of patience the lessons God teaches to those whom he would prepare for intimate fellowship with himself.

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## CHAPTER II

### HIS BIRTH AND EARLY TRAINING

**T**HE preparation for English Methodism was made in Oxford University and in a beautiful family life. John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Thomas Coke were fitted for their great work by home and university training. Two of this eminent band came to America on tours, and both were accomplished preachers. Why did not God select Whitefield or Coke to be the leader and organizer of American Methodism? No man ever had so large and eager a hearing in the New World as George Whitefield, or was equipped with a more winning and persuasive manner. All denominations welcomed him. But he was a voice and not an organizer. His leadership in England of Calvinistic Methodism had limited results. The Lady Huntingdon Connection has only a history to speak for it. The Welsh Calvinistic body remains, however, with its evangelistic spirit as a distinguishing feature. Thomas Coke had larger qualities as an organizer than Whitefield, was an able preacher, and had independent means sufficient for his own support; but his was not

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the clarion call to which the inchoate forces of American Methodism were to respond and it was not his considerable personality that the preachers were to acknowledge. Providence had in reserve a man humbler in attainments and popular qualities than either of these eminent preachers to marshal the hidden hosts of the New World in conflict with the enemies of God and man.

It surely was no accident in God's plans for the great nation soon to be born in the English colonies that an obscure young man, who had never entered Oxford for that preparation which doubles the power of most men, was selected to create practically American Methodism. God does not work by accident, but by wise and effective plans. He took a keeper of flocks in Midian, who was also a learned man, to bring about the emancipation of Israel in Egypt; a keeper of sheep in Canaan to be king of a prosperous nation; a dweller in the wilderness to face a wicked king and a more wicked queen; an unlearned fisherman to issue the challenge of the gospel to the autocratic Sanhedrin, and a persecuting Pharisee to become the Apostle to the Gentiles. And the result in every case answered to the wisdom of the appointment.

The man selected for leadership of the feeble Methodist societies in America, as yet without much promise, Francis Asbury, was born of good

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pure English blood in the good pure atmosphere of agricultural England, in the parish of Handsworth, four miles from Birmingham. It was a quiet orderly community in which the grosser forms of vice and wickedness had not developed and where the influence of religion still prevailed. The yeoman stock to which Joseph and Elizabeth Asbury belonged is good, clean, healthy stock, and those who spring from it are likely to have the inestimable blessing of being well born, a great advantage at the start of life's career.

The boyhood days of Francis (he was born August 20, 1745), if uneventful, were happy in a serene home life with conscientious, devoted parents, and in such mixed associations as a quiet country place affords. His account of himself indicates that the boy did not yield to the temptations to wickedness which can be found everywhere. It was a great thing for him to be able to say in manhood that he had "neither dared an oath, nor hazarded a lie"; that though the love of truth is not natural, he had been so well taught that he early acquired the habit of truthfulness, and his conscience would not let him swear. His parents gave him a prayer to say, and while his father did not establish family worship, they were all fond of singing and united often in praise. He knew boys who had become wicked, but he never quite came under their influence,



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returning home from their company with depressed spirit, hating the evil, but not always able to avoid contact with it. The influence of such an honest, conscientious, wholesome household is a boon to anyone. A boy is apt to be shaped for life in such an atmosphere, and well shaped. His school life began early, and he formed the habit of reading the Bible, the stories of which had a fascination for him.

His father was a gardener and had a good income, so that the family never suffered from actual need. With neither riches nor poverty they occupied that middle position which means comfort and contentment. Francis could have remained at school a long time; but the master was a churl and used to beat him cruelly, so that at last he could not face "the horrible dread," and went to live in a family which was wealthy but ungodly. Returning home, he chose, when thirteen and a half years old, to learn a trade and was an apprentice till twenty and had a happy life in his employer's family. While he was still at home a pious man, not a Methodist, visited his parents and talked about religion, and prayed, and under this influence the boy was awakened before he was fourteen years of age, and formed the habit of praying night and morning. He ceased to attend the parish church, the pastor of which was a blind guide, and went

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to West Bromwich Church, where he heard Ryland, Stillingfleet, Talbot, Venn, and other great preachers. He also read the sermons of Whitefield and Cennick, and he asked his mother about the Methodists, and she told him and sent him to Wednesbury, where he saw and heard them and was pleased with their deep devotional spirit, with their singing, and their informality. "The preacher had no prayer-book, and yet he prayed wonderfully," and he had "no sermon-book." It was "a strange way, but the best way." The boy "had no deep convictions" but he "had committed no deep known sins." He was sorry he could not weep, for he knew he was in a state of unbelief. Later in his father's barn he was conscious that the Lord pardoned his sins and justified his soul; but his companions led him to doubt this. He attended meetings at various houses and joined a class, but persecution came and closed these places. Then he held services at his father's house and other places and exhorted the people, several professing conversion. This was before he appeared in Methodist meeting houses.

Then he became a local preacher, under the direction of the itinerants, holding services far and near four or five times a week. After serving about five years in this capacity he gave his whole time to the work. He had, he says, a clear wit-



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ness of his acceptance with God, who showed him the evil of his heart. He enjoyed for a while, as he believed, the "perfect love of God," but this happy frame did not continue, although at seasons he was greatly blessed. As an itinerant he was much tempted, finding himself "exceedingly ignorant of almost everything a minister of the gospel ought to know."

How he came to offer himself as a missionary to America he does not very clearly indicate. He says it was in his mind during the first half of 1771. He had a strong feeling that he should offer himself for this service, but he does not say what caused it. Doubtless he had heard of the conditions in the colonies through letters from Captain Webb, Richard Boardman, and Joseph Pilmoor, and he speaks of "very great" trials he was enduring which he interpreted as a part of God's preparation "for future usefulness." At any rate, when he heard the call for men at the Bristol Conference in August, 1771, he writes, "I spoke my mind." He offered himself, and was accepted, having made a good record as an itinerant, being in young and buoyant manhood, everybody apparently approving. He broke the unwelcome news of his appointment to his parents as gently as possible, and though it was "grievous to flesh and blood," they consented to let him go. He believed his mother, "one of

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the tenderest parents in the world," had divine assistance in reconciling herself to his departure.

In three weeks' time he was ready to sail, but arrived at the port near Bristol with "not one penny of money," with no bedding except blankets, and apparently little idea what he would need on the long passage. But friends supplied him with clothes and ten pounds, and with his companion, Richard Wright, he sailed September 4. What faith he had in Divine Providence, how sure he was that he was obeying the call of God! How slight the training and preparation, from the human point of view, did this simple-minded youth have for his task of capturing the New World for God! "I go," he wrote on shipboard, "to live to God and to bring others so to do." How simple, how childlike, how modest, how unreserved his offer of himself, and yet how futile to the eye of human wisdom! But, as in the days of Paul, so in the days of Asbury, God's call was not to the wise, the mighty, the noble, but to the weak, the insignificant, the humble, that by these he might show forth the power and grace and wisdom of Jesus Christ.

Such is, in substance, Asbury's account of his early years and labors, preparation in England and call to the work in America. Always of a serious and thoughtful nature, sin appeared to him a terrible thing, and his tender conscience

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never allowed him to think lightly of his own faults and imperfections. To the end of his life he was faithful in setting down his shortcomings, and never excused sin in himself, however trivial it might seem to others.

The influence of his mother was evidently an abiding one in his life. He saw much more of her than of his father, and though in his earliest years she said little about religion, the death of her young daughter, Sarah, was a sore bereavement, and under the blow she turned for consolation to God's Word and became a constant Bible reader. "This afflictive Providence graciously terminated" in her conversion. This was before Methodism came to Handsworth. She spent much time in reading and prayer, having few neighbors who were in close sympathy with her devotion. "For fifty years," said her loving son, "her hands, her house, her heart were open to receive the people of God and ministers of Christ, and thus a lamp was lighted up in a dark place called Great Barre in Great Britain." Her son's tribute of affection was very beautiful and very tender. On her death he wrote:

She was an afflicted, yet most active woman, of quick bodily powers and masculine understanding. Nevertheless, "so kindly all the elements were mixed in her," her strong mind quickly felt the subduing influence of that Christian sympathy which "weeps with those who weep," and "rejoices

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with those who do rejoice." As a woman and a wife she was chaste, modest, blameless; as a mother (above all other women in the world would I claim her for my own) ardently affectionate; as "a mother in Israel" few of her sex have done more by a holy walk to live, and by personal labor to support, the gospel, and to wash the saints' feet; as a friend she was generous, true, and constant.

She died at the age of eighty-seven or eighty-eight years. His father had passed on six years before at the age of eighty-four or eighty-five, dying very happy. The bishop used to recall how his father wept at his departure for America, saying, "I shall never see him again," and he never did. For twenty-six years he was privileged to be with these noble, conscientious, wholesome parents, during which those formative influences came into his life to mold and fashion it for time and eternity, and when he sailed for America in 1771 his faith was fixed unalterably upon God and his face upon a life of devotion and service.

He never forgot his father and mother, but wrote to them regularly and sent remittances from time to time that they should never be in want in their declining years. They were the only family he was ever to have. There is a sentence in one of his letters to his mother, who wanted him to return, that has been interpreted as indicating that he had had an attachment to a young

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lady in England to which his mother had not been favorable. However this may be, he never entertained the thought of marriage in America, and he explains why in his *Journal*, when he was fifty-nine years of age. He intimates that it was the result of circumstances, not of choice. He was an itinerant at twenty-one, came to the colonies at twenty-six, expecting to go back when he was thirty. The war intervened and prevented his return, and the exigencies of his work held him until he became bishop and the onerous duties of that office required him to travel continuously and he could hardly expect "to find a woman with grace enough to enable her to live but one week out of fifty-two with her husband." He did not deem that wedlock under such conditions was proper. More than that, he had little or no money for the support of a wife.

This was clearly one of those exceptional cases in which the call of God to a supreme and engrossing duty justifies a noble, heroic soul in sacrificing the love and comfort and happiness of a home. Asbury never owned a house, and he could sing with most of the itinerants:

"No foot of land do I possess,  
No cottage in this wilderness."

The little that he left for his brother itinerants by his will had come to him as gifts or bequests



SITE OF ASBURY MONUMENT. COLUMBIA ROAD AND MOUNT  
PLEASANT STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.





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from admiring friends. As he said twelve years before his death, he would bestow the pittance he might have to spare "upon the widows and fatherless girls, and poor married men."

It is easy to see that his influence as a single man was much greater in securing unmarried men for the ministry. He did exert what pressure he could for some years while establishing the itinerancy to restrain preachers from marrying, at least as early as they might otherwise have entered into that relation.

The Francis Asbury that was could not have been produced in his full-rounded maturity except by a Christian home. In that home in Hands-worth was reared the leader who gathered and inspired and organized the religious forces which helped in winning a new nation to Christian civilization. He was not great in wealth and strength of mind; he was not a genius commanding the homage of men; he was not a born leader whom the multitude instinctively recognize and follow; he was not an orator to sway great audiences with eloquence; he was not a man of great personal magnetism to draw people to him in a strong friendship. He was a humble preacher commissioned of God to tell the story

"Of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and his glory,  
Of Jesus and his love,"

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with qualities of heart and mind, of courage and will, that could stand the severest test; of patience and perseverance never inactive, of clear perception and understanding, of conviction and faith that never wavered, and of a trust in God that the hosts of evil could not shake nor weaken.

It was, after all, men, and not devils, who tried him most. They attacked him in every way. They told him he was the biggest villain in America; that his preaching would empty the church; that he sought power over men to drive and enslave them; that he was a tyrant over the poor preachers; that he was vain and wanted honors to be paid to him; that he was determined either to rule or to ruin. Even John Wesley accused him, in a letter which the poor itinerant said was "a bitter pill," of strutting, and of calling himself a bishop, because it was a higher-sounding word than superintendent. Asbury was sensitive and felt deeply the attacks of O'Kelly and others, because they were so unjust and undeserved, but he bore them patiently. The praises that some men uttered to his face were by him deemed most dangerous, and he ever tried to avoid them.

But greatest of all elements in his preparation for his work was his settled faith and his constant communion with God. Benjamin Franklin had a settled faith from the beginning, and it was that which enabled him in his turbulent young life,

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both before and after he reached Philadelphia friendless and penniless, with no apparent future, to hold on his way serenely. Writing in old age about it he said: "That Being who gave me existence and through almost three score years has been continually showering his blessings upon me, whose very chastisements have been a blessing to me, can I doubt that he loves me?" Francis Asbury had a similar childlike faith which had been determined and settled before he left his English home, and God honored him for it and used him as the instrument of his providence for the leadership of a great and evergrowing movement for the salvation of men.

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### CHAPTER III

#### METHODISM IN THE FORMATIVE STAGE

VERY little had been done, before Asbury arrived, to apply in the colonies the rules and develop the system which the genius of John Wesley had brought into being in England in an orderly, methodical way. Wesley was a High Churchman, loyal to the Church of England, and he took no step contrary to the custom and order of that body until convinced that it was necessary and according to the will of God. It was not until the churches were closed to him and crowds, which available rooms could not accommodate, were anxious to hear him that he took up field preaching, recalling, as he did so, that Christ preached to the multitude on the mountain. The various features of Methodism were adopted under the pressure of circumstances:

1. *Societies* were organized for Christian fellowship, which was almost unknown at that time in the Established Church, and to guard against backsliding.

2. *Class-meetings*, small companies of converts who needed oversight of competent leaders for

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development in Christian life, and were convenient for systematic collection of funds for the work.

3. *Lay preachers* were recognized by Wesley as called of God to extend the work.

4. *Field preaching*, a necessity, since the churches were closed to Wesley, and crowds too large for available rooms were eager to hear him.

5. *Tickets* were issued quarterly to members in good standing to limit attendance at love feasts and meetings of society. It was thought very desirable that unconverted persons should, as a rule, be excluded.

6. *Itinerancy*. The necessity for frequent changes in the appointment of preachers grew out of the fact that it was a movement, not a church, societies increasing too fast to obtain, and being too weak to maintain, settled pastors. The itinerant plan, with frequent changes, made the largest use possible of the limited supply.

7. *Love feasts*. Revival of the *agape* of the primitive church for the deepening of the spiritual life in fellowship.

8. *Quarterly meeting*. An English feature adopted near the rise of the societies, and recognized by the Conference of 1749, which directed assistants to hold it in every society and "therein diligently inquire into both the spiritual and temporal interests" of each. It does not appear that

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Asbury introduced it among the American societies, but he found it already in use in Maryland, as did Boardman, who preceded him. Probably Strawbridge adopted it as he had known it in Ireland. Asbury evidently believed in it and made provision for it in the *Discipline*. Before the Annual Conference came into use the character of the preachers was examined at the "Quarterly Meeting Conferences," as they were afterward called. The word "Meeting" in the title was retained until 1852, when it was dropped. Our Methodist historians refer to the Quarterly Conference, but none of them appear to have given its history. Stevens, speaking of the English Wesleyan Conference of 1749, says, that one of its acts was to order that quarterly meetings, which had been held in some places, should thereafter "be observed in all the societies." They were great occasions in Maryland, even in Strawbridge's day, when people came from far and near to attend them; and they were very popular in country districts, during a large part of the last century, covering Sunday completely and Saturday in whole or in part. The change of title which seems to have been decreed in the Methodist Episcopal Church will sever another tie to the early history of Methodism, though the Conference itself is to be retained.

9. *An Annual Conference* soon became necessary

M I N U T E S

OF THE

Methodist Conferences,

ANNUALLY HELD IN

A M E R I C A,

From 1773 to 1794, inclusive.



*P H I L A D E L P H I A :*

PRINTED BY HENRY TUCKNISS, NO. 25, CHURCH-ALLEY,  
AND SOLD BY JOHN DICKINS, NO. 44, NORTH SECOND  
STREET, NEAR ARCH STREET.

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M DCC XCV.

FAC-SIMILE OF TITLE PAGE OF  
FIRST DISCIPLINE



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summer of 1780. It appears that Quarterly Meetings or Conferences had been established there at this early date, doubtless by Strawbridge, and there was no complaint of violation of the *Discipline*, except in the administration of the ordinances in which many members favored his action.

From the first Asbury's zeal for the discipline was manifested. His *Journal* makes frequent reference to the subject. On his first visit to the New York society he was pleased to see in some members "a love of discipline." In these days the word "discipline" conveys the idea of processes involving trial and penalties with the thought of "correction" for faults or failures. But in Asbury's time it meant the laws prescribing methods of procedure. It was, in his sight, quite wrong to admit to love feasts anybody but those holding tickets, which nobody living in our days has ever used, or even seen, except as antiquities. Meetings of the society, held often Sunday evening, in charge of the preacher were also for members only, except that twice or thrice at the utmost, others could be admitted. Asbury sometimes "kept the door" himself to see that only those having the right to do so were admitted. The idea, of course, was that the people of God should be by themselves, with nothing to distract from the deep devotions and close personal examination conducted for the soul's welfare. At

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Philadelphia, in April, 1772, he "kept the door" and heard afterward that those kept out were greatly offended. But he refused to let it trouble him.

Later, he was in New York, and after preaching in the morning, attending Saint Paul's for communion in the afternoon, he preached at night and then met the society. He writes that he had "a dry time" and was grieved to see the worldliness of the people in the matter of dress. He does not explain what gave him "a dry time"—possibly it was the sight of some fashionable dresses. He criticized Richard Wright, his ship companion, for ending a revival in John Street Church with a general love feast, which "is undoing," he said, "all he has done."

Methodists were long regarded as a plain people who observed the scriptural provision against "the putting on of gold or costly apparel," introduced in the General Rules by the Wesleys and, of course, well known to Asbury; but neither he nor John Wesley seems to have kept it literally, for the latter wore a gold seal and the former a gold watch. In the English Minutes the term used was, "superfluous ornaments." Of course these were for use and not mere ornaments. And both had clothes made of good cloth, which is always more costly than inferior goods. Here, again, the distinction between use and mere

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decoration applies. Asbury particularly objected to feathers as an adornment, though not for the same reason that the law now protects birds, but as an unnecessary gilding of the lily. Once at dinner where the ladies had head-dresses he called attention to what he considered a superfluous decoration. The ladies maintained a polite silence but one of his own sex quietly remarked he thought it was a matter of little moment. The retort might have been made: "But you, sir, wear a wig, not for necessary head covering, but from useless custom." Asbury's wig attracted much attention, he tells us. At times he laid it aside. When he finally discarded it he does not say.

The first *Discipline*, printed in 1785, has a provision against issuing love-feast tickets to "any that wear (calashes) high heads, (or) enormous bonnets, *ruffles* or *rings*" (Italics copied). This was in answer to the question: "Do we observe any evil which has lately prevailed among our societies?"

There were good, sound reasons for economy in expenditures in those days, not only for Methodists, but for others as well. It was before the age of machinery which has so marvelously added to the power of production, so that the articles and wealth of commerce have increased almost beyond computation. Other countries produced most of the things America needed, except natural

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products, and the money in circulation was limited. Moreover, it was a new country, and, under the new order of separation of church and state, the churches had to learn how to raise their own expenses and especially to provide the means for church buildings and parsonages. It is remarkable that the small Methodist societies in New York and Maryland were able to erect two, if not three, church edifices within a few years after they were formed. The New York building cost a considerable sum of money. Soon after, a church building was bought in Philadelphia, a parsonage erected in New York, and a third church in Maryland.

The early church buildings were of necessity plain. Asbury did not like steeples, nor bells, nor organs. He writes about a Methodist church in Augusta, Georgia, with a cracked bell over the gallery. "May it break!" he exclaims. It was the first he ever saw "in a house of ours in America; I hope it will be the last." In June, 1813, in New Hampshire he writes that Methodism in the East is not what he would like to have it. He says:

In New England we sing, we build houses, we eat, and stand at prayer. Here preachers locate and people support them, and have traveling preachers also. . . . Oh, rare steeple houses, bells (organs by and by); these things are against me and contrary to the simplicity of Christ.

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Then he adds: "We have made a stand in the New England Conference against steeples and pews; and shall possibly give up the houses unless the pews are taken out." The clause next to the last probably refers to joint ownership of the edifices with another denomination, an expedient to save expense. What he means by linking together singing, building and eating with "standing at prayer" is not clear; nor is his reference to traveling preachers, unless some of them received salaries instead of "quarterage" or support.

"Quarterage," quarterly contributions, in common use from the first, is now a thing quite of the last century. Asbury never had what was called a salary, but was paid, like the other itinerants, about sixty-four dollars a year for personal needs, clothing, etc. (subsequently increased to eighty dollars), where he was laboring, together with traveling expenses. Board was generally provided free.

Simplicity was the order of the times, and none lived more simply than the preachers and the majority of members. Methodism made its appeal to the poor, although it did not refuse to receive the well-to-do. Asbury himself brought a number of distinguished families into the church—governors, judges, physicians, and others of standing and influence in their respective communities.



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Methodism was long solicitous not to be known as a rich man's church. This began not with Asbury, but with Wesley. Lord Falkland is credited with this epigram, "Religion gave birth to wealth and was devoured by its own offspring," and if Wesley did not use this particular quotation, he did assert the difficulty of wealthy men maintaining a fervent faith. There was for many years a provision in the *Discipline*, probably copied from the English *Minutes*, advising against the building of costly churches, for these would make rich men necessary to us, to the detriment of Methodist simplicity. It disappeared at last,<sup>1</sup> for in the cities and larger towns edifices of wood were forbidden, and brick and stone became necessary as a protection against fire. Moreover, church buildings are built now for future as well as present needs, and are therefore more economical because they last so much longer. Three buildings have occupied the oldest site which American Methodism possesses, that of old John Street in New York. Embury's church was torn down in 1818 and a new one erected, to give place in turn to the present building in 1848, and

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<sup>1</sup> The words which were dropped in 1872 were those following "unavoidable": "Let all our churches be built plain and decent and with free seats, as far as possible; but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable; otherwise the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us. And if dependent on them and governed by them, then farewell Methodist discipline, if not doctrine, too."

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a fourth is now desperately needed; whereas Saint George's, in Philadelphia, bought from another denomination, was in use from the beginning until a few years ago.

A description of the first John Street Church as built by Embury and others at a cost of considerably more than the estimated £600, shows that it was of ballasted stone, covered outside with stucco and whitewashed inside. The high pulpit resting on a single pillar and entered by a winding stair, the front of the gallery, and the front of the altar were painted white. A plain carpet covered the altar and pulpit stairs. In the altar were two wooden benches and a few chairs with a plain table. Lamps with sperm oil gave the light, and round high stoves the heat. The book board was without cushion and the floor uncarpeted. The windows had green blinds outside, and on the men's side rows of pegs for their hats were fastened on the walls. The seating was of wooden benches, with narrow strips for the back. Those in Light Street Church, Baltimore, when the first General Conference met in 1784, are said to have been minus backs. The women and men were separated with the aisle between them. For years this rule was strictly enforced, and if a man entering late sat on the women's side, the sexton would order him to his own side, even during the service. There were





FIRST JOHN STREET CHURCH  
Built by Philip Embury in 1768



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three preaching services ordinarily on Sunday, namely, at 10:30 A. M., 3 P. M. and at night. Prayer meeting was held Wednesday night, a lecture was given on some other evening, and classes on other evenings. Church floors were uncarpeted, and sometimes sanded.

What is known as the "Old Book" of John Street, containing the accounts both of the church building and the preacher's house, and of payments to and for the preachers, carries some curious and interesting items. At that early day a man was paid for giving instruction in singing. The amount is £2, 6; but the period covered is not mentioned. For a letter from Philadelphia for Preacher Boardman one shilling is charged. For preacher's board £12, no period mentioned, and for preacher's housekeeping £5, 13, 5. A lawyer got sixteen shillings for advice, a modest fee. The care of Preacher Williams' horse cost £3, 16, 1, and a feather bed, bolster and pillow £7, 16, 4, which should have insured good goose feathers. Another item is for shaving preachers £2, 5, 6; a pair of sheets (linen?) cost £1, and two letters for Pilmoor and one for Williams, three shillings; a pair of blankets, £1; clothing for Boardman £7, 10, and "to carry him to Philadelphia," £2. "Sugar and wine" cost 13s. 9d., probably communion wine; a looking-glass £1, 4, preacher's washing £2, 18 (it must have been allowed to

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accumulate), and poll tax for Preacher Wright, sixteen shillings.

Another charge is for a top hat for the preacher.

The following questions and answers,<sup>2</sup> given in substance, cover an official meeting held by Asbury when he first served John Street Church:

1. When shall there be public preaching?  
Tuesday, Thursday and Friday nights, besides the Lord's Day and Saturday night.
2. Shall there be Sunday morning preaching?  
Yes.
3. Shall the society meeting be private?  
Some doubted, but Asbury insisted on the rule and read a letter from Wesley in support of it.
4. Shall there be weekly and quarterly collections?  
Yes.
5. How shall the debt of \$1,100 be raised?  
No means devised.
6. Shall we be more strict with disorderly persons?  
No.
7. Shall there be three stewards?  
No.
8. Are we sufficiently frugal?  
Yes.
9. Shall the stewards meet the pastor once a week?  
Yes.
10. Do we avoid all partiality?  
No answer.
11. Can we cover the balance of our accounts?  
Yes.

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<sup>2</sup> Seaman's Annals.

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12. Who shall stand at the door for the society meeting?  
Not determined.
13. Shall the Preacher meet the Society Sunday nights?  
Agreed to after some opposition.
14. Who shall be the collectors?  
Not determined.
15. Shall the Preacher meet the children?  
Yes.
16. Shall we spread books?  
Undetermined.

Evidently, lay officials did not always meet the wishes of the preachers.

The class meeting seems to have commended itself from the first, both in England and America, as a means of developing the spiritual life by close personal contact once a week of small companies of members under the care of a competent leader. In such a small company the members soon became familiar with one another and with the leader, losing their timidity, gaining confidence in relating their experiences, growing in grace and in power to resist evil influences, and also learning how to bear testimony in love feast and prayer meeting before larger gatherings. It was a good school of practical training, and out of it came effective exhorters, local preachers, and itinerants. All societies maintained classes, and often, if not always, a small class preceded and led to the organization of a society, as in the beginnings of Embury in New York and Strawbridge in Mary-

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land. Asbury encouraged this feature, and in his travels, even after he became bishop, met the classes himself, wherever he had time to do so. His *Journal* has no complaint, so far as I recall, that they were anywhere neglected. In a visit to Brooklyn in July, 1795, he preached in the morning, assisted in the administration of the sacrament in the afternoon, "met the black [Negro] classes," preached at half-past six and closed the day by meeting two men's classes. The next day he met nine classes and adds: "I have now spoken to most of the members here, one by one." The next year he met six classes in New York, besides preaching three times, and also the society. He told the latter that they knew little of his life and labors, except in the pulpit, the family, and meetings. They did not even know of his labors in that city, much less where he had been and what he had done during the year.

Out of the class meeting grew the prayer meeting, which Asbury encouraged. In Maryland as early as September, 1779, he speaks of pressing a society to have prayer meetings, and adds, "they appointed one before they parted." The class meeting Methodism dropped long since; but the prayer meeting abides, though, unfortunately, with diminished attendance and power. The faithful bishop would have been greatly dis-

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tressed at the thought of the gradual decline and death of the class meeting, but with its chief substitute also waning he would have been filled with a fearful foreboding.

In the days before the Methodist periodical press was instituted Asbury's custom to meet the societies and the classes as often as possible and to pay pastoral visits among the members enabled him to acquire first-hand information as to the condition and needs of Methodism throughout the long and rapidly lengthening line of its organized societies. He saw with a prophet's vision that this movement was destined to become a mighty one, and that the few hundreds he found when he landed in 1771 were destined to increase to thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, and millions, and he believed the best guaranty of its continued purity, as its power and influence developed, was to be found in the faithful maintenance of its doctrines and discipline, which he accepted from the beginning as the best in the world.



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### CHAPTER IV

#### AS A SERIES OF SOCIETIES

**A**MERICAN Methodism, in a little over a century and a half, from humble and insignificant beginnings, has attained to the dignity and power of a communion of over 9,000,000 members. Covering more completely than any other church the States and territories of this widely extended republic, it has by its missionary enterprise established itself in half the countries of Europe, in the great divisions of Asia, and in the North, the South, the East, and the West of the continents of Africa and South America.

“Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth.” It was, indeed, a little fire among the clusters of houses in New York and the log cabins of Maryland, in the middle of the eighteenth century; scarcely more than a lighted match in the hands of Philip Embury and Robert Strawbridge. A puff of adversity might have extinguished it, but for the hovering hand of Divine Providence. These men were laymen, like those who were scattered abroad from Jerusalem and carried with them the Pentecostal fire that kindled unquenchable flames at Antioch and Phenice and Cyprus.

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More humble and insignificant beginnings it would be difficult to find. The first comers from Ireland were not driven to the New World by persecution, like the Puritans and the Quakers, nor by zeal for the conversion of the pagan Indians, like Catholic monks, nor even to preach rediscovered truths of the gospel, but, rather, by the necessity of seeking a more adequate income for their families, a purpose deemed worthy in all ages of the world. Philip Embury and Robert Strawbridge were carpenters and brought along the tools of their trade. The latter found immediate occasion to use his in the woods at Sams Creek in putting together a cabin for his family and later a log meetinghouse, the first Methodist place of worship in Maryland. In New York Embury opened his carpenter's chest to erect Wesley Chapel. Their Methodist faith had not been forgotten in the exigencies of colonial life, but each, like the Roman centurion, built with help, of course, a house of worship for the people.

From these little beginnings of the Irish Methodists in New York and Maryland, American Methodism has descended. They were like those in Asia Minor where simple believers preceded the apostles in Antioch in preaching and winning converts, who were the first to be called Christians. Embury and Strawbridge were simple believers who had never been ordained and were

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not sent by bishop or church, or even by John Wesley, and yet through them spiritual flames had been kindled, and appeals were made to Wesley to send missionaries to take up the work and extend it. Among the letters written to him of which we know was one by Captain Webb, the soldier-preacher, and Thomas Taylor, an Englishman, who had arrived in New York in October 26, 1767, a year after Embury had organized a society. Doctor Wrangle, a Lutheran minister who had been preaching in Philadelphia, and knew Methodists there, dined with Wesley in London, on his way back to Sweden, and urged that missionaries be sent to help the Americans, "multitudes of whom are as sheep without a shepherd." Probably there were other appeals. That they were not in vain is indicated by an entry in Wesley's *Journal*, concerning the conference at Leeds, August 1, 1768:

On Thursday I mentioned the case of our brethren in New York, who had built the first Methodist preaching house in America, and were in great want of money and much more of preaching. Two of our preachers, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, willingly offered themselves for the service, by whom we determined to send £50 as a token of our brotherly love.

These were the first preachers to be sent by the British Wesleyan Conference to America, though Robert Williams and John King had pre-

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ceded them as voluntary recruits, and made good in successful evangelistic service. Of the dozen or more English preachers who came to the colonies to help in building up Methodism none were ordained men, none had the right to administer the ordinances, until Dr. Thomas Coke, a presbyter of the Church of England, and Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, whom Wesley had himself ordained as presbyters or elders, arrived late in 1784. Francis Asbury was an itinerant, with license as a local preacher, and never, in the thirteen years he traveled and preached among the societies, prior to his ordination as deacon and elder and consecration as bishop, in 1784, ventured to baptize or administer the communion, though no one knew better than he the fact that in large sections of the country Methodists were deprived of these ordinances. He and others went to communion in Episcopal churches, as opportunity offered, following Wesley's example in England.

Robert Strawbridge, whose service was chiefly among rural societies, could not be expected, from his circuit experience in Ireland, to appreciate the ecclesiastical questions involved in venturing to take into his own hands, as an unordained man, the authority to administer the ordinances. He knew that through no fault of their own the people were deprived of them. They ought to

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have them, and all that prevented was a question of church order. As he could not untie this Gordian knot, he cut it, unheeding, it would seem, of the possibility of a break with John Wesley and his English Conference, and yet to these he owed his conversion and such knowledge as he had of the Methodist system, as also his license as a local preacher. The first American Conference of preachers, in 1773, at Philadelphia, in which all who participated were Europeans, definitely accepted the doctrines and discipline of the movement, as set forth in the *Minutes* of the Wesleyan Conference, and also Wesley's oversight, and bound themselves in solemn agreement not to administer the ordinances, and not to fellowship those who did.

Referring to this action of preachers at Philadelphia who had promised Wesley when they were appointed that they would work under his direction, accept his doctrine, and establish his discipline in America, Doctor Buckley, in his *A History of Methodists in the United States*, quotes a paragraph from Jesse Lee's *History of the Methodists* and calls it "the best defense of this attitude, unanswerable from every point of view." Lee's statement follows:

We were only a religious society, and not a church; and any member of any church, who would conform to our rules and meet in a class, had liberty to continue in his own church.



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But as most of our society had been brought up in the Church of England (so called), and especially those of Maryland and Virginia, it was recommended to them to attend the services of that church and to partake of the ordinances at the hands of the ministers; for at that time the church people were established by law in Maryland and Virginia, and the ministers were supported by a tax on the people. In many places for a hundred miles together there was no one to baptize a child except a minister of the Established Church.

The word "societies" continued to be used until 1816, when "churches" was substituted in the *Discipline*. "Superintendent" was used in the first *Discipline*, but was changed to "bishop" in 1787. Asbury was accused by a certain disaffected person with having ordered the preachers to address him as bishop, and this preacher, who afterward withdrew, tried to make it appear that he was putting on airs. The incident from which the rather large inferences were drawn was a very simple one, as related in his *Journal*. The preachers themselves raised the question what title they should use in addressing letters. Objection had been made to both "Rev." and "Mr." The latter as an abbreviation of "Master" was contrary to Scripture—"Call no man master." The conclusion was that the official title should be used, as deacon, elder, bishop, which was certainly logical.

The action at Philadelphia definitely put Amer-

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ican Methodism under the doctrine and discipline of Wesley and his Conference, which was the natural and orderly procedure. Robert Strawbridge had begun to baptize and celebrate communion soon after his arrival. At a quarterly meeting in Maryland, in 1772, he had defended the use of the sacraments, Asbury taking the other side; but as Boardman at a previous quarterly meeting had yielded on this point, Asbury thought it wise not to be too insistent, particularly as he was at that time only "assistant" and had no more official authority than any other preacher in charge of a circuit. According to Asbury, it was the understanding at the Philadelphia Conference that an exception was to be made in Strawbridge's case and he was to be allowed to administer the ordinances under the particular direction of the assistant. But Strawbridge would not yield even this much. His name appeared among the appointments in 1775, but not in 1774. He settled on a farm near Baltimore and ceased to itinerate about the same time, and died in 1781, to the sorrow of many, preachers and people, to whom he had been a spiritual father.

The Philadelphia Conference is repeatedly designated as the "British Wesleyan" Conference, in a document presented to the General Conference of 1916, by the Commission on Priority;<sup>1</sup> evidently,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Origin of American Methodism*, pamphlet. J. F. Goucher.



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for the purpose of accentuating alleged differences between the English itinerants and Mr. Strawbridge and his followers in Maryland who are called "American" Methodists. On what authority this discrimination is based does not appear. The *Minutes* of the Conference as printed give it no such title. It is simply called: *Minutes of some conversations between the Preachers in connection with the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, Philadelphia, June, 1773*. The list of appointments includes the names of Strawbridge, Watters, and Williams, who were not present. Doctor Buckley says: "At that time the Methodists of America regarded themselves as much under the direction of Wesley as did those of Europe, relying upon him to send them preachers and such directions as he might deem necessary."<sup>2</sup>

There is no evidence that Strawbridge and his followers in Maryland ever refused to recognize the Philadelphia Conference, or to receive the English preachers, either before or after the Conference of 1773. Captain Webb, Joseph Pilmoor, Richard Boardman, Francis Asbury, Robert Williams, and John King were apparently welcome. Francis Asbury took up work in Baltimore early in 1773. Little of permanent value had been accomplished there. No houses had been open to preaching, services having been held in market

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<sup>2</sup> *A History of Methodists in the United States*, pp. 141, 142.

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places or on street corners. Asbury changed all this, bringing order and system out of chaos. His circuit included Baltimore and six counties, with twenty-four appointments, covering two hundred miles, and he traversed it once in three weeks, preaching, exhorting, classifying, and holding quarterly meetings.”<sup>3</sup> As the result of his labors the first church building in Baltimore was begun in November, 1773, and a second was started six months later. Mr. Strawbridge did not refuse to attend Quarterly Conferences held by Boardman and by Asbury, and seemed to be in harmony with the proceedings on every point but one, the administration of the ordinances. There was no rift between Maryland and New York or Philadelphia Methodism and no disagreement except as to the sacraments. It is curious to note in the Priority Report that Philip Embury began “Wesleyan Methodist preaching” in New York, while Robert Strawbridge, who, like Embury, came from Ireland, where they both preached under direction of John Wesley, began “Methodist preaching” in Maryland. It seems quite in accord with this touch of prejudice that Boardman and Asbury should be charged with having “assumed to dominate” certain Quarterly Conferences in Maryland and “to dictate to Mr. Strawbridge.” Happily, if there was any occasion for a feeling

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<sup>3</sup> *History of Methodists in the United States*, James M. Buckley, p. 134,

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of resentment on the part of Strawbridge, his good sense and devotion to the cause speedily overcame it, and ten years later Methodism was organized in Baltimore as one body, with no evidence that there had ever been two factions, and on John Wesley's plan, with John Wesley's four representatives taking a conspicuous part in the proceedings.

The sacramental question continued to be a pressing one in the South. At a Conference in Virginia in 1779 a committee on ordination was appointed who proceeded to ordain each other and certain others who administered the ordinances to such as were willing to accept them. Rankin, the General Assistant, a strict disciplinarian, but more autocratic than Asbury, was opposed to this departure and gave offense by his arbitrary rulings; but the latter's method of persistent, kindly, and tactful pressure proved successful, and, quite unexpectedly, after an earnest season of prayer by Asbury and Garrettson separately, the breach was healed. Thus, happily, the connection with Wesley remained unbroken to the end. Forbearance in love won where compulsion would have failed. Through all this troublous period, when it was so difficult to enforce discipline, and when finally the English preachers, one after another, under war conditions, went back to the mother country, Francis Asbury never

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swerved in his loyalty to John Wesley and his doctrinal and disciplinary system, and though at times he was depressed as he thought of the only home he had in the world, and longed to see his father and mother, his only kin, it was his deep sense of duty, under God, to the Methodists of America, who would be left without a shepherd, that decided him to stay. No one knew them as he knew them; no one could appreciate the dangers threatening them, or the great possibilities opening to them as did this lonely, homeless, sickly man whose love and joy, fears and hopes, in the deepest travails of his soul, bound him to them as with hooks of steel.

The issue when it came, after the colonies had become a separate nation, was met by Wesley himself as a statesman who knew how to do a great thing magnanimously. He had been convinced that in the primitive church presbyters and bishops were on a parity, and as a presbyter of the Church of England he did not hesitate when an emergency came to assume episcopal powers. He therefore ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as presbyters and Thomas Coke, already a presbyter, as superintendent, to have authority with Francis Asbury to superintend American Methodism. So at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, in 1784, Wesley's plan was carried out, Asbury was elected superintend-

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ent, or bishop, and was ordained deacon and elder and consecrated bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was surely worth while to wait patiently, for less than a score of years, in the society stage, without an ordained ministry and without the sacraments, to come so happily into a heritage that nobody is disposed to depreciate. The societies in America had from the first the same rights and privileges as those in England. Both Wesley and his people were persecuted and disowned by the Church of England, and conditions in America were no worse. Bishop Asbury accepted his new responsibilities with no fret of mind or of conscience as to whether he was in the apostolic succession, the claim to which has never brought the Church of England into close relations with the Church of Rome, which has the real thing, if any church has it, though it has been a barrier to Anglican recognition of the great body of evangelical Christians of the world.

Before passing on from the beginnings of American Methodism it will be proper to give some attention to the question of priority, which has been under discussion many years. Who organized the first Methodist society, Philip Embury in New York or Robert Strawbridge in Maryland? It can hardly be considered a matter of great moment, but it is certainly one of interest. With the purpose of securing a final definite decision



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the Baltimore Annual Conference memorialized the General Conference of 1912 to provide for the appointment of a commission to investigate and decide whether the honor belongs to Maryland or to New York. The commission was bipartisan, three members being from the vicinity of Baltimore and three from the vicinity of New York, as required, with a seventh at large. In November, 1915, the Board of Bishops took action, recommending that, as "serious objection had been made to the work and the composition of the commission," the said commission defer action until the approaching General Conference "can clear up the legal and practical questions involved." In obedience to this action of the bishops the three members of the commission from New York, regarding it in effect as "an impeachment of the fitness and competency of the commission to make a fair and impartial historical inquiry and reach a decision that shall command respect," declined to take part in the investigation. The Baltimore members, with the member at large and representatives of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and of the Methodist Protestant Church, organized as a joint commission, and proceeded with the case in the absence of the New York members, and reached a "unanimous" conclusion, without having heard the case for New York, finding that the beginnings in Maryland were

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prior to those in New York. Of the fourteen present and voting, ten were from Baltimore and vicinity. Majority<sup>4</sup> and minority<sup>5</sup> reports went to the General Conference of 1916, and were referred to a special committee of fifteen. This committee refused to accept the findings of the majority report or to direct that the Historical Statement be amended, and declaring that the question of priority "cannot be finally determined by methods thus far employed, or by a commission thus constituted," recommended a commission of jurists to hear and decide the case. This commission was named in 1923. The General Conference accepted and adopted its committee's reports by a large vote.

Historical questions can hardly be conclusively settled by a bipartisan commission, in which experts sit in judgment upon their own cases, or by a commission of jurists. Jurists may be experts in the rules of legal evidence, but legal evidence and historical evidence are not one and the same, but quite different. No decision of a historical question, like that of priority, can be finally settled, even by the General Conference itself. Such questions must be opened at any time when new evidence is produced.

So far as the authority of the church is con-

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<sup>4</sup> *Origin of American Methodism*, pamphlet, J. F. Goucher.

<sup>5</sup> *The First Methodist Society in America*, pamphlet, H. K. Carroll.



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cerned, it appears to be in favor of the claims of New York for priority. The Historical Statement, which has been printed in the *Discipline* from the beginning, with unimportant changes, says:

In the year 1766 Philip Embury, a Wesleyan local preacher from Ireland, began to preach in New York City, and formed a society, now John Street Church. . . . About the same time Robert Strawbridge, from Ireland, settled in Frederick County, Maryland, preaching there and forming societies.

The natural inference is that the precedence of Embury in the statement means that he was before Strawbridge in time, but that the two beginnings were not far apart. On behalf of the claim for Strawbridge it is contended that the mention of Embury first has no significance. But the church, through its General Conference, has declared differently. The General Conference of 1860 fixed the year 1866 as the centenary of American Methodism, and in response to a Baltimore memorial asking that an earlier year be named replied that whatever may be claimed for Maryland Methodism, "it must nevertheless be admitted that the society above mentioned in New York was the first association or organization of American Methodism." The action of the General Conference of 1864 was in harmony with that of 1860. The early itinerants, Pilmoor, who arrived

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November 4, 1769, and worked with Strawbridge in Maryland; Freeborn Garrettson, born in Maryland, whose first appointment was on Frederick Circuit; William Watters, also of Maryland, the first native-born itinerant; Thomas Morrell, Ezekiel Cooper, also of Maryland; Henry Boehm, Thomas E. Bond, editor of *The Christian Advocate*, whose parents were converts of Strawbridge; Jesse Lee, of Virginia, the first historian of American Methodism, and a host of others bear testimony to the priority of Embury. So also do most of the historical writers.

The historical facts about Embury's arrival and work in New York are well settled. He landed in New York, with a numerous company, including members of his Irish class, August 10, 1760; advertised as a teacher in March, 1761; applied to the governor of New York Colony, with a number of others, for a patent of land, February 1, 1763; preached in his own house the middle of October, 1766, and organized a class; formed a society at the end of the month; bought a lot in March, 1768, built a church on it and dedicated it October 30, 1768.<sup>6</sup>

If it be asked when Robert Strawbridge left Ireland, and where and when he landed in America, there are no records to answer. Methodist historians in Ireland do not support the supposition

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<sup>6</sup> *The First Methodist Society in America*, H. K. Carroll, pp. 49-51.

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that he left Ireland as early as 1759 or 1760. Crook's<sup>7</sup> careful and searching inquiry leads him to the conclusion that Strawbridge and his young wife left Ireland in 1766, and he believes it would be impossible to prove an earlier date. Crookshank<sup>8</sup> agrees. The difficulty with the Maryland case is the lack of records and exact dates. Strawbridge settled at Sams Creek "about 1761"; baptized Henry Maynard "as early as 1762 or 1763"; led John Evans to Christ "as early as 1763 or 1764"; began forming societies "as early as 1763 or 1764."<sup>9</sup> These findings are too vague. Asbury seems to give positive and definite testimony to Strawbridge's priority, in an entry in his *Journal* at Pipe Creek, May 1, 1801: "This settlement of Pipe Creek is the richest in the State; Here Mr. Strawbridge formed the first society in Maryland—and America."

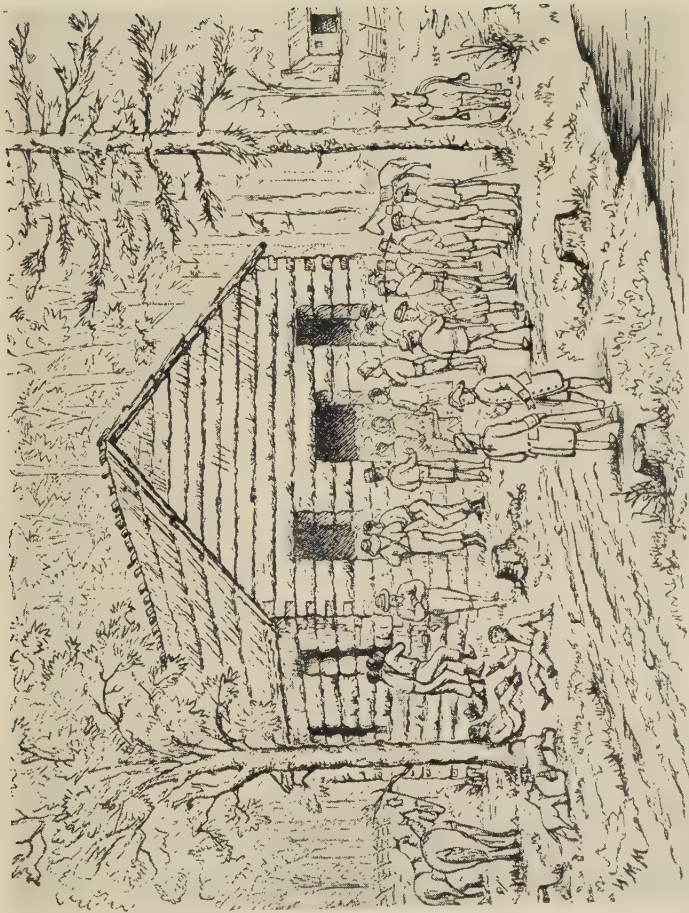
It is a pity the date of the society was not added; it would have been the key to the interpretation. If Asbury really added the words "and America," he should have stricken out "Maryland—and." They were unnecessary. But if he meant to give Maryland priority, would he not have changed the Historical Statement (which was from his hand) in the *Discipline*? And he

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<sup>7</sup> *Ireland and the Centenary of Methodism*, Rev. William Crook, 1866.

<sup>8</sup> *Wesley and His Times*, C. H. Crookshank.

<sup>9</sup> *The Origin of American Methodism*, pamphlet, J. F. Goucher, p. 7.



### LOG MEETING HOUSE

Built by Robert Strawbridge at Sams Creek, the First in Maryland



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ought not to have given the priority to New York in subsequent letters, the last one to the General Conference of 1816, in which he referred to what had been wrought "in less than fifty years in America." Less than fifty years from January 8, 1816, would not run back beyond 1766, certainly not to "1763 or 1764."

Ezekiel Cooper, an early itinerant, a traveling companion of Asbury, and the successor of John Dickins as book agent, in a funeral sermon of his friend Asbury, says "the first society was formed by Philip Embury" in New York. And I have in my possession a compendium of Methodism in Cooper's handwriting, with notes on the back of the manuscript indicating that he used it in examining candidates for ordination, in which this native of Maryland, who became an itinerant in 1783, distinctly says in the form of question and answer,"

12. When, where and by whom was the first Methodist society formed in America? 1766, New York, by Philip Embury; about the same time, in Maryland, Robert Strawbridge, near Pipe Creek, Frederick county.

In answer to another question about the erection of meetinghouses, he writes: "The first was built in New York, 1768. Another was built near Pipe Creek, Frederick County, Maryland, about the same time." Thus this distinguished itinerant, who was a lad in his teens when Strawbridge



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began his labors in Frederick county, stated that the first society was formed and the first meeting-house erected in New York and the next society and the second meetinghouse in Maryland "about the same time." This is a sufficient interpretation of the Historical Statement. Atkinson's *Beginnings of Wesleyan Methodism in America* gathers an immense amount of information on this subject from all sources, and his positive statements are trustworthy.

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## CHAPTER V

### ITS DOCTRINAL TEACHING

**T**HE doctrines which Wesley and his itinerant Methodist host preached in England, though new to that age and country, were as old as Christianity. They were in harmony with the teachings of Christ and the apostles, and the great Methodist leader rediscovered them and taught them in a practical way to the wondering and rejoicing converts of his day. He asserted that they were in harmony with the doctrines of the Church of England and made this clear by his marvelous facility in lucid statement.

It is worth while to recover from an old letter, which few of his followers of this century have seen, Wesley's putting of the case. He wrote to a brother clergyman that he differed not at all from ministers who adhere to the doctrines of the church, but only from those who dissent from it, though they own it not. In the briefest, clearest way possible he proceeds:

First, they speak of justification, either as the same thing with sanctification, or as something consequent upon it.

I believe justification to be wholly distinct from sanctification, and necessarily antecedent to it.

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Secondly, they speak of our own holiness, or good works, as the cause of our justification. . . .

I believe, neither our own holiness nor good works are any part of the cause of our justification, but that the death and righteousness of Christ are the whole and sole cause of it. . . .

Thirdly, they speak of good works as a condition of justification, necessarily previous to it.

I believe that no good work can be previous to justification, nor consequently a condition of it. But that we are justified . . . by faith alone, faith without works, faith (though producing all, yet) including no good work.

Fourthly, they speak of sanctification, or holiness, as if it were an outward thing, as if it consisted chiefly, if not wholly, in these two points: 1. The doing no harm; 2. The doing good . . . that is, the using the means of grace and helping our neighbor.

I believe it to be an inward thing, namely, the life of God in the soul of man; a participation of the divine nature; the mind that was in Christ; or, the renewal of our heart after the image of Him that created us.

Lastly, they speak of the new birth as an outward thing, as if it were no more than baptism . . . a change from a vicious to a virtuous life.

I believe it to be an inward thing; a change from inward wickedness to inward goodness; an entire change of our inmost nature from the image of the devil . . . to the image of God . . . from earthly and sensual to heavenly and holy affections.<sup>1</sup>

“There is, therefore,” he adds, “a wide, essential, fundamental, irreconcilable difference between us.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Life of the Reverend John Wesley, Thomas Coke and Henry Moore*, pp. 195, 196.

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This succinct statement pours a flood of light upon the state of belief that prevailed among the clergy of the Church of England and shows partly why Wesley was shut out of its pulpits and sometimes even from its altars. The same views were doubtless held by most of the clergy in America, though Deveraux Jarratt, of Virginia, and a few others, preached Wesley's doctrines and had converts. One of the other kind tried to prevent Asbury from preaching in his parish in Maryland, threatening to invoke the law against him. But Asbury said he had authority from God and proceeded to urge his hearers to repent, the minister staying to hear what he said and then telling the people that they were wrong to attend.

There was no question of dissent by Pilmoor, Asbury, or any of the itinerants commissioned in America, from the Wesleyan doctrinal system as preached in England. The early preaching here, as also the later, was by men who knew by experience how salvation by faith is received. Their own testimony of the passing from death unto life was a part of their message. They could say, with Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

The message they brought was a message of hope to sinners, lost sinners; and they insisted in

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the plainest way that all not already saved were sinners and therefore in the lost state. They must first have conviction of sin and the need of salvation, then they must call upon God for mercy, with repentance and tears of contrition; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour; accept God's gracious pardon; confess him before men, and give their lives to his service. And it was their privilege to know that their sins were washed away. John Wesley, in a talk with his saintly mother about assurance of faith, or witness of the Spirit to forgiveness of sins, found that only recently had she known of the forgiveness of her sins. She had thought this knowledge would not be given until death, except to a few. Her father, Samuel Annesley, a clergyman, had enjoyed that experience, but she had never heard him preach it, and supposed he regarded it as the peculiar blessing of the few. This was one of the doctrines revived by Methodism.

Methodist preaching was also very definite on the subject of the terrible punishment awaiting lost sinners. Not one ray of hope was held out to them of the possibility of repentance after death, or of a limited punishment. Universalism was coming into view with its doctrines of restoration and reformation of the penitent after death, but the Methodist and the other evangelical churches treated it as a dangerous heresy.

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The descriptions of the place of the lost were of the most lurid character and the torments pictured were designed to arouse the indifferent and lead them to seek salvation. The preachers quoted Scripture as their authority. Had not Christ himself used the most realistic language, and did not Paul say, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men"? It is doubtless more agreeable to place chief emphasis upon love as the constraining force, and choice of a holy rather than a sinful life as the best motives for becoming Christians; but the terrible background of shadows, covering the unavailing remorse of the wicked, cannot be altogether neglected if the teachings of the Scriptures are to rule; else salvation loses much of its meaning.

It was fortunate for early American Methodism that, not having college men to make preachers of, they were able to train converts in the school of experience. Beginning with conversion, they entered immediately into practice in prayer and witnessing; developing the spiritual life in avoiding evil and doing good, in resisting temptation and seeking service, in inviting others to accept Christ; in exhorting to small gatherings, in preaching as supplies—that was an admirable substitute, at least, for the production in educational institutions of efficient evangelists. For nearly twenty years there were no churches, only so-



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cieties and classes; few meetinghouses, mostly private homes, barns, courthouses, barrooms, opened to preaching, and the written, finished sermon would have been incongruous, almost absurd. Most of the preaching was without the aid of pulpits and the formal manuscript would have been strange and ineffective at the informal meetings. Evangelism must be simple, plain, direct in its approach, heart-to-heart in its appeals, and in everyday language. Cold logic is not its best medium, but persuasion, entreaty. Peter did not read his testimony, but, relying on the Spirit, whose descent a few days previously had shaken the vast assembly, spoke from the heart in testimony of what he had seen and heard and knew. Whitefield spoke in the same way, and his chaste and beautiful language was not foreign to one of those rare prophets of God whose burning eloquence few generations are privileged to hear.

The first great need of the people of the colonies was to be called to repentance by men of themselves who had just passed through the experience. After converts were secured they must be led in the new life, instructed and edified, and this work must be done by pastor-preachers, and pastors came in good time. The sermons were generally made up of personal testimonies and appeals, with abundance of "Thus saith the

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Lord” as divine authority enforcing all that was said. The Bible was little known and understood by the masses, and the preachers did great service in quoting liberally from its teachings. They selected familiar texts from both the New Testament and the Old. Asbury gives the texts for many of his sermons and also the outlines.<sup>2</sup>

The peculiar doctrines of Methodism were made more acceptable to the masses by the declaration in the most outspoken way of the freedom of the will. Calvinism of the strict type prevailed among the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Reformed and also in most of the Baptist churches. The doctrines of unconditional election, reprobation, final perseverance, and the like, were preached from the pulpit. Whitefield accepted them and attacked his best friend, John Wesley, for his Arminian attitude. Wesley did not publicly oppose them until Whitefield and others forced him to declare his views. Conflict in America could not be avoided when Methodism rose into prominence. Asbury makes reference to the subject frequently in his *Journal*. He speaks with approval of a book against predestination which he had read. He reports a conversation with a Presbyterian minister who held that conversion preceded faith and repentance, remarking that it was a strange reversal, putting the effective

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IX, “Asbury as a Preacher.”

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cause as a result. He preached a sermon on predestination, reprobation, antinomianism, and Universalism, and on another occasion observes that absolute, unconditional predestination “nullifies all laws, human and divine,” for if men cannot do otherwise than they do, “why should they be punished?” He continues:

Must quadrupeds be punished because they do not fly? Believing this doctrine men might ascribe their envy, malice, and most cruel inclinations to the effect of divine predestination and conclude that their most malignant dispositions were eternally decreed, and therefore not to be conquered.<sup>3</sup>

What influence Methodism has had in modifying Calvinism, so that what it is now is a mere shadow of what its former advocates tenaciously held, it is hard to estimate. The old controversy long since disappeared and the present generation know little or nothing of it. Dr. Daniel D. Whedon, for many years editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, also of a series of *Commentaries*, and author of a volume on *The Freedom of the Will*, was a doughty warrior against the Princeton School, three quarters of a century ago. In controversy with Professor Hodge he wielded a keen scalpel. The early Methodist preachers were often deficient in education. This led Presbyterian ministers to undervalue them and to

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<sup>3</sup> *Heart of Asbury's Journal*, Ezra Squier Tipple, pp. 115-116.

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say things about their lack of polish that were extremely irritating, so that discussions on Calvinism and Arminianism were not always in good humor. Bishop Asbury admired the Presbyterians for their respect for the ministry, but was nettled when now and then one of them put on superior airs and looked down upon the Methodists.

The Baptists were stiff Calvinists, except small bodies called Free Will and General, who espoused Arminianism. They have been expert controversialists on the subject of infant baptism and mode of baptism, and used to exchange broadsides both with neighboring Methodist and Presbyterian churches. In the nineteenth century controversy ran high and waxed hot. Interdenominational debates between champions for and against the scriptural mode of baptism, and other controverted questions, were held in the South, lasting several days, the debaters taking turns. Some of these debates were published in full in large volumes, which are a curiosity in this age when interdenominational peace is unbroken and deadly armament is no longer thought in place of the pulpit, except as directed against giant evils. In 1843 a debate was held in Lexington, Kentucky, between Alexander Campbell, of the Disciples of Christ, and Nathan L. Rice, of the Presbyterian Church, on baptism, human creeds, etc. It extended through eighteen days. It is

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reported in a volume of one thousand pages. It has been said that every argument, for and against, can be found within its covers. Not all; the discovery of the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," indicating that pouring, as well as dipping was practiced, in the subapostolic age, had not then been discovered.

A certain debate in Indiana between a Methodist and a Universalist lasted three days.

In the course of the debate the Universalist painted a hell for the Methodist champion and his brethren to look at, and then flung into it all the human race that orthodoxy excluded from heaven. The Methodist replied by sending Judas to heaven before his Lord and carried all liars, lechers, seducers, and murderers to Abraham's bosom, "all bedeviled and unrepentant as they were."<sup>4</sup>

Among the controversies was one with the Shakers, who had a community at Busroe, Indiana, where they made perverts of Methodists, Presbyterians, and others. Peter Cartwright went there to save the remnant of Methodists and issued a challenge to the Shakers to a debate, which was declined. Nevertheless, the proposed meeting was held, and Cartwright spoke for three hours, "until the very foundations of every Shaker present were shaken from under him."<sup>5</sup> The champion won forty-seven persons from the

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<sup>4</sup> *The Rise of Methodism in the West*, William Warren Sweet, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 53.

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Shaker community and enrolled them as Methodists.<sup>6</sup> These debates, which Methodist preachers did not shun, developed in many of them great readiness in discussion. In New Harmony, Indiana, the Rev. James Armstrong, an itinerant, was preaching in a hall open to all denominations, when a member of the Community of Rappites, interrupted him with questions:

"How do you know you have a soul?"

To this Armstrong replied, "I feel it."

"Did you ever smell, taste, see, or hear your soul?"

"No," said Armstrong.

"Then you have four senses against you."

Armstrong then propounded this question to his questioner:

"Mr. Jennings, did you ever have the toothache?"

"Yes," said Jennings.

"Did you ever smell, taste, see, or hear the toothache?" asked the preacher.

"No," replied Jennings.

"Then," said Armstrong, "you have four senses against you."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *The Rise of Methodism in the West*, William Warren Sweet., p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.



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### CHAPTER VI

#### HOW THE ITINERANCY WAS ESTABLISHED

THE most constant and effective itinerant American Methodism has ever had was Francis Asbury. He began to itinerate as soon as he landed, and he never ceased to itinerate, except for brief periods by force of circumstances beyond his control, until death overtook him on the road, ending at once his travels, his labors, and his life, March 31, 1816. His consecration as bishop only had the effect of increasing his itinerancy. On his ceaseless rounds of travel he preached daily, held class, society, and prayer meetings, visited from house to house, met the Conferences, ordained and appointed the preachers, kept in touch with them by letter, and collected subscriptions to make up deficiencies in their support—in short, combining the work of bishop, itinerant preacher, pastor, exhorter, class leader and lay official. In the discharge of these manifold functions he has never had a successor. If forced to choose a single word to describe his vast unceasing activities, I would select *Itinerant*. He was an itinerant

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of the itinerants. The successive steps in his career as layman, local preacher, ordained deacon and elder, consecrated bishop are all distinguished by the one word Itinerant. He was not the first to itinerate in America, but he was the first of all the itinerants in the breadth, the quality and the quantity of his labors. The title "bishop" added no distinction to his honors as an itinerant. It laid new and heavy burdens upon his slender shoulders, brought more insistent demands upon his crowded hours, his strength, his patience; heaped more reproach upon his laboring heart, made his sensitive soul the target for shafts of malice and misrepresentation, and burdened him daily with the care of all the churches.

This greatest itinerant of American Methodism not only itinerated himself but caused others to itinerate also. No other man exerted such constant, resistless pressure to establish the itinerancy; no other man gave so forceful an example of the thing itself. If one particular service of a life of singular devotion as father and founder of American Methodism were to be selected for its pre-eminent value, it would have to be, I think, Asbury's success in persuading the preachers to itinerate. The conditions of the age and country and the settled pastorate of the other denominations were against him in his determination to bring about "a circulation of the preachers." The

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other churches had educated and trained ministers, with colleges to prepare young men and a system of instructing them in theology as assistants to older ministers in charge of churches, just as lawyers and doctors studied law and medicine under practitioners of experience. The Congregational, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Reformed bodies all had well-educated ministers in their pulpits and would have tolerated no others. The Baptist churches had a few qualified ministers, but when they began to increase they had no adequate source of supply to fill the growing demand, and took what they could get. Their situation in this respect was similar to that of the Methodists. The Revolution prostrated the Episcopal churches, because the majority of their ministers were Englishmen and went back home. It did not cut off the source of supply of Lutherans and the two Reformed churches from Sweden, Holland and Germany, but it did interrupt the coming of recruits from England for the Congregational churches, and from England, Scotland, and Ireland for the Presbyterian and Methodist. Of course the American army had need of all the young men, so preparation for the ministry could not go on in the colleges of William and Mary, Princeton, Yale, Harvard, and Brown.

The itinerancy helped Methodism greatly be-

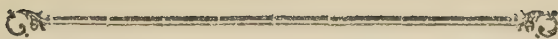
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cause, with all the English missionaries back in England, it multiplied the service of preachers who remained by its system of circulation on circuits. Moreover, it increased the supply easily and naturally by advancing those showing grace, gifts, and usefulness from exhorters to local preachers and from local preachers to itinerants. Each circuit embraced a considerable number of appointments, under the care of an "assistant" and several "helpers," as they were called. Asbury arranged one for himself from Baltimore of twenty-four preaching places. Soon after his arrival he wanted seven preachers to travel on seven circuits aggregating seven hundred miles. Philadelphia became a center with chains of appointments in Camden and Salem counties, another to Chester and Wilmington, and still another to Bristol, Burlington, and Trenton. New York was also a center, with preaching places at Elizabeth and other points in New Jersey, in Brooklyn and points on Long Island and up the Hudson and into Connecticut.

It was Asbury's idea that the preachers should change frequently and that their tendency to remain in the cities should be resisted. He had a fear that the most acceptable men would become popular, and popularity would cause partiality in the appointments and some would eventually cease to circulate. He discovered that some

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wanted to settle in the cities “and live like gentlemen,” by which he meant an easy life, such as no man who rode a circuit could possibly have. It has been said that Asbury himself had his first appointments in Philadelphia, New York, and Baltimore and that it did not become him to criticize others. But Asbury did not confine himself to cities, but went out into the large country spaces, and always had his chain of appointments—twenty-four in Baltimore, and lesser numbers in Philadelphia and New York. The appointments at the first Conference of 1773 reflect his plan, in the provision that Thomas Rankin and George Shadford, appointed to New York and Philadelphia respectively, should “change in four months.” The next Conference in 1774 required the appointees, Francis Asbury, New York, and Thomas Rankin, Philadelphia, to “change in three months” and for the first time appeared at the end of the appointments the order: “All the preachers to change at half the year’s end.” The peculiar expression, “at half the year’s end,” appears once again in 1775 and not thereafter, and no reference is made in the minutes of subsequent Conferences to changes within the year, until 1780, when the six months’ period is named, and the practice of changing in the middle of the Conference year appears to have become fully recognized.



# M I N U T E S

OF SOME  
CONVERSATIONS  
BETWEEN THE  
PREACHERS

IN CONNECTION WITH

The Rev. Mr. John Wesley.

PHILADELPHIA,

June, 1773.



**T**HE following queries were proposed to every preacher :

1. Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley and that conference, to extend to the preachers and people in America, as well as in Great-Britain and Ireland?

*Answ.* Yes.

2. Ought not the doctrine and discipline of the Methodists, as contained in the minutes, to be the sole rule of our conduct who labour, in the connection with Mr. Wesley, in America?

*Answ.* Yes.

3. If so, does it not follow, that if any preachers deviate from the minutes, we can have no fellowship with them till they change their conduct?

*Answ.* Yes.

The following rules were agreed to by all the preachers present :

1. Every preacher who acts in connection with Mr. Wesley and the brethren who labour in America, is strictly to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper.

FAC-SIMILE OF MINUTES OF FIRST  
CONFERENCE, 1773 (1)



2. All the people among whom we labour to be earnestly exhorted to attend the church, and to receive the ordinances there; but in a particular manner to press the people in Maryland and Virginia, to the observance of this minute.

3. No person or persons to be admitted to our love-feasts oftener than twice or thrice, unless they become members; and none to be admitted to the society meetings more than thrice.

4. None of the preachers in America to reprint any of Mr. Wesley's books, without his authority (when it can be got) and the consent of their brethren.

5. Robert Williams to sell the books he has already printed, but to print no more, unless under the above restriction.

6. Every preacher who acts as an assistant, to send an account of the work once in six months to the general assistant.

*Quest. 1. How are the preachers stationed?*

<i>New-York,</i>	Thomas Rankin,	} to change in 4 mons.
<i>Philadelphia,</i>	George Shadford,	
<i>New-Jersey,</i>	John King,	}
	William Waters.	
	Francis Asbury,	
<i>Baltimore,</i>	Robert Strawbridge,	
	Abraham Whitworth,	}
	Joseph Yerbery.	
<i>Norfolk,</i>	-	Richard Wright.
<i>Petersburg,</i>	-	Robert Williams.

*Quest. 2. What number are there in the society?*

<i>Ans. New-York</i>	-	180
<i>Philadelphia</i>	-	180
<i>New-Jersey</i>	-	200
<i>Maryland</i>	-	500
<i>Virginia</i>	-	100

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The minutes show that the term "assistant" was applied, as in England, to those who were in charge of circuits and that of "helpers" to all others of the traveling order. In the minutes of the Christmas Conference of 1784 "elders" appears for the first time and "assistants" for the last. "Deacons" is the new term for "assistants," and preachers on trial succeeded the "helpers."

The names of the English preachers, Thomas Rankin, who had been appointed general assistant by Wesley, George Shadford and Martin Rodda, do not appear in the Minutes after the Conference of 1777, they having returned to England. Francis Asbury did not attend the Conference of 1778, held at Leesburg, Virginia, as he was in retirement at Judge White's house in Delaware. The Revolution was in full tide, and as an Englishman Asbury was, of course, suspect and could not appear publicly without danger of arrest. His name does not appear on the roll of this Conference. In 1779, at the Conference for the Northern stations, held in Delaware, Asbury's name was restored and he was one of eighteen who agreed to accept appointments, notwithstanding the difficulties feared from the prejudice against Methodist preachers, because of popular feeling that they were in sympathy with England. The Conference took action to the effect that

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Asbury ought to act as General Assistant, Rankin being no longer in America; Wesley appointed him to that position in the fall of 1783, as soon as he could reach him by letter. Asbury in a letter to Joseph Benson, speaking of Joseph Rankin, who had gone to the British in Philadelphia, in 1777, says:

It appeared to me that his object was to sweep the continent of every preacher that Mr. Wesley sent to it and of every respectable traveling preacher of Europe who had graduated among us, whether English or Irish. He told us that if we returned to our native country, we would be esteemed as such obedient, loyal subjects that we would obtain ordination in the grand Episcopal Church of England and come back to America with high respectability after the war was ended.

The fact that preachers were stationed every year during the war, and that they increased every year except in 1778, when no Conference was held in the North and no Northern appointments scheduled, but one, is rather remarkable, for the Presbyterian and other denominations suffered serious interruption of their church work by the exigencies of the war.

Beginning with the Conference of 1773, when ten preachers were stationed, the number increased to thirty-six in 1777, dropped apparently to thirty in 1778, to rise to forty-nine in 1779, losing seven in 1780, gaining thereafter steadily

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till the number eighty-three was reached in the early summer of 1784, a net gain of seventy-three in the eleven years. Where did the seventy-three come from? From the circuit school of the itinerancy in which they were advanced from class to class, as exhorters, local preachers to the traveling order. And they were graduated as exhorters from the class and prayer meeting, where they learned how to speak in the presence of others.

In each successive Conference one may see the development of the responsibilities, duties, and privileges of the preachers. In the first Conference, accepting the authority of John Wesley and his doctrine and discipline, they bound themselves not to continue in fellowship with those who refused obedience thereto; preachers must not administer the ordinances; they must advise the people to apply to the ministers of the church for the sacraments; they must see that non-members are not admitted to love feasts and society meetings more than twice or thrice; they must not reprint Wesley's books without his authority and the consent of their brethren; and all assistants must make report once in six months to the General Assistant.

From the very first the preachers began to report their work. This feature of the Conferences Asbury always valued highly and expressed a

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sense of loss when it was curtailed. The thought that a report must be made stimulates activity that there may be something worth while to report. Another duty imposed upon itinerants was to make returns of members. Five States were covered by the statistics of 1773, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, and the total was 1,160, a little less than a threefold increase from Asbury's estimate of 316 in 1771, which was probably an underestimate.

At the second Conference in 1774 another feature of the itinerancy was adopted—that of admitting young preachers on trial, the term being first for one year, a little later lengthened to two years. And the preachers' support also received attention. Each was to be allowed £6, Pennsylvania currency, per quarter, and traveling expenses, and preachers in full connection were to have the use and ownership of the horse furnished them by the circuit. Easter collections were to be taken for church debts and relief of needy preachers. It was a common occurrence, even in those early days, for preachers to go to Conference not fully paid. Asbury was always sympathetic with these embarrassed men, and helped them out of his own slim resources when he could. At the Western Conference in Ohio his feelings were so stirred by a desperate case that he parted with a shirt, a coat, and other

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garments. It is humiliating to be compelled to admit that even in this advanced age of strong and wealthy churches and large salaries, preachers do not always go to Conference with salaries fully paid. Doubtless, if the grand total of arrears due Methodist ministers from the beginning could be computed it would be enough to make the present superannuate fund quite adequate for several years. Church contributions being purely voluntary, the preacher is the first to suffer and the doctor next, when the income is pinched. One thing is sure: the preachers themselves never stinted their full service, nor hesitated to sacrifice their own comforts and actual needs to help out the church and to answer urgent appeals. The Conference of 1774 also began the examination of the characters of the preachers, another feature of the itinerancy which was of distinct value in preserving its purity and keeping it free from scandal.

The Conference of 1775 proclaimed a general fast July 18, for the prosperity of the work and the peace of the country and made provision for the expenses of preachers from Conference to appointment from the yearly collection, a custom which was followed thereafter. The number of members at the previous Conference, 2,073, nearly double that of 1773, was 3,148 at this Conference, a gain of more than fifty per cent. Thus the



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itinerants, many of whom were new, came to Conference bringing their sheaves with them, and making full proof of their ministry. Even under the untoward circumstances of 1776 a further gain was made of 1,773, the total being 4,921, showing more than fifty-five per cent increase.

The next Conference, 1777, attempted to correct a recognized evil of that age in eulogies of the dead in funeral sermons by agreeing that they would preach no funeral discourses except for those dying in the faith. The gain of members was 1,174 and this, too, exclusive of the Northern churches.

Passing over the Conference of 1778, of which only the Southern section met, the Conference of 1779, held in two sections, the Northern in Delaware, the Southern in Virginia, urged that every preacher meet the classes where he preaches, if possible, that the children be met every fortnight and that their parents be questioned about them. These were the days before the Sunday school had made its appearance, when the duty of the church to them and their value to the church received little attention. It was also determined that a preacher who is able to travel and does not shall receive no quarterage: a spur to keep the itinerancy moving.

The Conference of 1780, held likewise in two sections, took action to provide trustees to hold

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the property of the churches, which was increasing. In another question and answer, for this form has always marked Conference proceedings, can be seen the diligent hand of Asbury:

Q. Ought not our preachers to make conscience of rising at four, and if not, at five, and is it not a shame for a preacher to be in bed till six in the morning?

Ans. Undoubtedly they ought.

That was Asbury's own plan, and if it was a good thing for him, why was it not a good thing for them? Many of them were uneducated and untrained, at least in the Bible and its teachings, and Asbury thought no man was properly qualified to preach who was not well versed in the Bible. They might be ignorant of all other books, but not to know the Word of God was fatal. And the devoted man said if he had not formed the habit of early rising, he could not have read it through so often nor studied it so thoroughly, nor had sufficient time for his prayers. The Conference also provided that the wives of preachers, "if they stand in need," should have the same quarterage as their husbands. The preacher being in the saddle nearly every day and from home, must leave his wife and family behind him, and the quarterage paid him could not be stretched to cover also their expenses. Asbury was never married himself, not because he would

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not have appreciated the blessings of a home, but because he was married to Methodism and must give every waking hour and every thought to its welfare. It troubled him greatly because so many of his preachers married. Not that he did not believe in the institution, but because it added to the problem of support. When a young preacher took a wife he thought of him as a man with a divided mind and a divided duty and also of the additional cost it would involve in quarterage. He speaks of it often in his *Journal*, saying in one place he had great trouble in stationing the preachers, seventy out of ninety-five being married men, "with children and sick wives," this fact greatly increasing the claims on the Conference. On another occasion he exclaims: "Here are eight young men lately married; these will call for \$400 additional—so we go." Calling to mind the loss of ministers who had turned to the world, and the marriage of so many, he remarked to a friend, "The women and the devil will get all my preachers."

At this Conference, held in Baltimore, slavery came up for consideration, and itinerants holding slaves were requested to free them, and other "friends" were also advised to do the same thing, on the ground that the holding of slaves "is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, hurtful to society and contrary to the dictates of

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conscience and pure religion.” Asbury had an Englishman’s curious interest in Negroes and always sympathized with them and wrote frequently in his *Journal* against slavery. Another evil, distilling, was also condemned and it was agreed that “our friends” who will not renounce the practice of wasting good grain should be disowned. Both of these questions—slavery and the liquor traffic—were to become burning questions, involving the very life of the nation. The testimony of Methodism never became uncertain on the liquor evil, but the attempt to keep the traveling preachers free from slave-holding was to divide the Methodist Episcopal Church, near the close of the next half century, the most momentous division any denomination in America has suffered.

The Conference of 1782 unanimously chose “Brother Asbury to act according to Mr. Wesley’s original appointment and preside over the American Conferences and the whole work.” This was a notable tribute of personal affection and esteem and also a recognition of the man’s sterling character as an impartial and able executive that must have been exceedingly grateful to him. Doubtless he was an autocrat (so was John Wesley), but an autocrat was needed to bring order and discipline out of chaotic and inchoate conditions; but Asbury exercised autocratic powers

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firmly, and not harshly, and was so saintly in his austere life that it was not always hard to bow to his will.

The Conference of the early part of 1784 reported 14,988 members, indicating that the anomalous condition of the societies, with no ordained ministers to administer the ordinances, with the war and its hindrances and losses intervening, and with the prejudices naturally existing toward England, Englishmen, and English institutions, must have had far less effect than might have been reasonably expected. It is a tribute to the new ministerial plan that it worked so well, under the most unfavorable circumstances conceivable; and it shows what a man with an unalterable conviction, an indomitable will, and a genius for persuading men to yield their own preferences for the general good, can bring to pass. At the beginning of the period Francis Asbury said there was not "such a circulation of preachers" as he would like. Did he not feel at the end of it, when the Methodist Episcopal Church had been organized and the chief itinerant preacher had been consecrated as an itinerant bishop, that there was at last such a circulation of preachers as he had longed for, a body of a hundred men, going cheerfully to their appointments from the Annual Conference on long circuits and changing in the middle of the year. Truly the circuit as



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a school had yielded good fruit, and the itinerant plan had worked well.

Asbury's methods with the preachers were not dictatorial or overbearing. His predecessor as General Assistant, Thomas Rankin, aroused resentment by his manner, as noted in Asbury's *Journal*, and would have brought on a rebellion among the preachers if his heavy-handed rule had continued. Asbury knew all the sufferings and hardships of his brethren, and was always sympathetic and helpful. He felt the responsibility of making the appointments and gave much careful thought and prayer to it. It was with a sense of joy, almost jubilation, that he closed a Conference, if he could say that he had had little trouble in fixing the stations and heard of no complaints. The Rev. J. B. Finley, who was ordained in 1811 at the Western Conference in Ohio, told of an incident in his own life, when he wanted a change of appointment and did not get it. He said:

Brother Asbury said to the preachers, "Brethren, if any of you shall have anything peculiar in your circumstances that should be known to the superintendent in making your appointment, if you will drop me a note, I will, as far as will be compatible with the great interests of the church, endeavor to accommodate you." I had a great desire to go West, because I had relatives, which called me in that direction, and it would be more pleasant to be with them; so I sat down and addressed a polite note to the bishop requesting him to send me West. My request was not granted. I



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was sent a hundred miles East. I said to him: "If that's the way you answer prayers, you will get no more prayers from me."

"Well," he said, "be a good son, James, and all things will work together for good."

Such incidents have not been rare in the history of the itinerancy, and are not to be interpreted as due to an arbitrary exercise of power. Many considerations enter into the making of appointments, and any bishop worthy of the office must sometimes reach decisions that may be called hard by the man affected to whom all the circumstances in the case cannot be made known. In the days of Asbury and his coadjutors, ministers were always prepared for surprises, not knowing where they were to go, often, until the appointments were announced. Such surprises are not unknown in these days when representatives of churches, as well as the preachers, have access to the bishop with their requests.

In the early period of the itinerancy many preachers for various reasons located. Strawbridge did this after less than a decade of active service.

The difficulty of maintaining the time limit, without having it fixed by a definite law, soon became too great even for the bishop of the indomitable will. The tendency to extend the term was strong, and exceptional cases began to

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arise and trouble the appointing power. While New York was in the hands of the British no change could be made in the appointment to Wesley Church. Samuel Spraggs being already there served the charge five years in succession, and it seemed best to appoint him for a sixth year, making a rather serious precedent. Wesley had written Asbury in 1785 to say that a three-year term seemed to him rather dangerous. It was, he said, "A vehement alteration in the Methodist discipline. We have no such custom in England, Scotland, or Ireland." Asbury, in a letter to Thomas Morrell in 1793, expressed the conviction that there ought to be a change generally of presiding elders and others, but there were, he admitted, great difficulties. He had in mind the great importance of having in every large church able men who knew the discipline and how to enforce it. Some years later a case arose in Albany which caused the bishop much trouble. A preacher, very acceptable to the educated class, was serving in that city, and the church, through a committee, expressed the desire to keep him, and were allowed to do so a third and then a fourth year. Asbury objected, but reluctantly yielded when told that removal would disrupt the church. But he did finally refuse to renew the appointment, the result being that the preacher left the denomination. One or

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two similar cases occurred, and then the General Conference of 1804 adopted a rule fixing the pastoral limitation at two years. With this definite law behind him the bishop doubtless found himself quite able to deny requests of either preacher or lay committee for a third-year appointment. It was thereafter the law, and not the discretion of the bishop, that settled the limit.

The question, "Who desist from traveling?" first appears in the Conference of 1779 when two ceased to travel. In 1781 five went off the active list, including John Dickins, the first book agent, the next year three, and the year following four, and so on. The question was changed in form in 1789—"Who are under location through weakness of body or family concern?" and the list had swelled to eight. Another question, never thereafter to be omitted: "Who have died this year?" Not many had been called hence hitherto, but a gradually increasing host "have crossed the flood." "God buries his workmen, but carries on his work," as John Wesley saw.

It will be fitting to close this chapter with a statement of Nicholas Snethen, sometimes called Asbury's "silver trumpet," in a sermon preached in 1841:

We have always regarded Mr. Asbury as the father of the itinerant ministry in the United States. He maintained the ground through the early perils. When the want of learning

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was urged as an objection to the admission of a young man, Mr. Asbury would reply that the saddlebags were the best school for traveling preachers, meaning that they learned faster and best on horseback. But he regarded them as learners on horseback, and no master was more ready to rebuke the first indication of presumption or indolence. And, in effect, there was much schooling, though to superficial observers there seemed to be none, among these youthful itinerants.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Centennial History of American Methodism*, John Atkinson, pp. 143-4.

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### CHAPTER VII

#### OTHER DENOMINATIONS IN AMERICA

**W**HEN Methodists first came to America in the second half of the eighteenth century, the leading denominations of Europe had long been maintaining Christian worship here, not only in the older and larger settlements but also in the borders of the wilderness, and even in the heart of the wilderness itself. The hardy pioneers of trade sought furs and other primitive articles of commerce, bringing necessities of life to settlers, and also fire water and firearms to the eager savage.

Roman Catholics were the first European comers to America. Near the beginning of the sixteenth century Florida, Texas, old Mexico, Louisiana, and the Mississippi region were visited by Catholic priests intent on ministering to immigrants from Europe and on saving the pagan Indians. On the latter errand came in turn Dominican, Jesuit, and Franciscan monks. Among secular priests, the names of La Salle, Hennepin, and Marquette, of the French missions, are wrought into the annals of discovery along the line of the Mississippi and elsewhere.

But back of all this the Roman Catholic his-

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torian claims an interest for his church in the early Norse invasion of Greenland and speaks of a Catholic bishop of that section in 1112, well on to four hundred years before Columbus made his immortal westward journey of discovery. And yet, with its many early beginnings in various parts of the country, before the days of the Cavalier settlements in Virginia, or of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, or of the coming of the Hollandish founders of New Amsterdam and New Netherland, the Roman Catholic Church was the last of the leading denominations of Europe to form an organization in this part of the New World. It was not until 1789 that John Carroll, of Baltimore, was appointed first bishop of his church in the United States.

Francis Asbury was elected and consecrated bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, also in Baltimore, five years before the Catholics had any one here competent to ordain men to the priesthood. It is an interesting fact that the first American Catholic prelate hesitated to accept the offer of Cardinal Antonelli, papal secretary of state, to make him prefect apostolic, as a step to the office of bishop. It conferred little distinction and promised no help in increasing the number of priests, a desperate need. In his letter of acceptance the priest spoke of the disabilities which adherents of the Catholic faith



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were under in most places, "not being admitted to any office in the State, unless they renounce all foreign jurisdiction, civil and ecclesiastical." The good sense of John Wesley had relieved the Methodists of any embarrassment of this kind; but the Pope could not do as much for the American Catholics.

In Virginia English colonists had formed the settlement of Jamestown as early as 1607, and their first act on landing was to engage in the worship of Almighty God, according to the ritual of the Church of England. This service, conducted by Chaplain Hunt, was under an awning stretched between four trees ("The groves were God's first temples") "to shaden us," according to the historian, Smith, "from the sunne" (it was in May).

Our walles were rales of wood, our seats unhewed trees till wee cut planks; our pulpit a bar of wood nailed to two neighboring trees. This was our Church, till wee built a homely thing like a barne, set upon crotchets covered with rafts, sedge and earth. We had daily common prayer, morning and evening, every Sunday two sermons and every three months the Holy Communion, till our minister died. But our prayers daily, with an homily on Sundaies, wee continued two or three years after till more Preachers came.<sup>1</sup>

A worthy beginning of the great enterprise of colonizing the New World, the recognition of

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Episcopal Church*, Charles Comfort Tiffany, pp. 18-14.

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Almighty God as the Creator of the universe and the Ruler of men in his great out-of-doors temple, simple and impressive, as the act of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock thirteen years later.

In Virginia, later in Maryland, and later still in New York and New Jersey and elsewhere, the Church of England was the Established Church, under the general oversight of the Bishop of London. Its ministers naturally came from England—none could be produced here—most of them as missionaries of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, under whose auspices John Wesley had served in Georgia.

One of the weaknesses of the colonial church was its incompleteness. The door to the ministry is the episcopate.<sup>2</sup> No bishop, no ordinations; no ordinations, no native ministers. The source of supply was entirely foreign, hence a lack of close sympathy between ministers and congregations. The War of Independence naturally vacated most of the pulpits, and peace found a prostrate church powerless for reorganization, for the key was in the hands of the church of another nation, with which we had been at war.

The need of a bishop for the American colonies had been recognized in England as early as 1638 by Laud, and application for one or two had

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<sup>2</sup> *History of Episcopal Church*, Charles Comfort Tiffany, p. 15.

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been made many times, but always to fail. After peace came, the Rev. Samuel Seabury, of Connecticut, sought and obtained consecration from the bishops of Scotland, November 14, 1784, at Aberdeen. That was earlier than the consecration of Francis Asbury, but Seabury did not reach Connecticut until June, 1785, and was not formally accepted as bishop until August, of the same year, by the first convocation of the diocese. Charles Wesley saw Bishop Seabury in London, on his return to America, and expressed regret that his brother, John Wesley, had not waited a little longer to see "a real primitive bishop in America duly consecrated by three Scotch bishops," who was ready, as he told Charles, to ordain any Methodist preachers who were duly qualified. When two more bishops had been consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, they with Seabury sat in a Convention which completed the organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, in July, 1789.

The Pilgrims of the Mayflower and later the Puritans came to establish "a state without a king, and a church without a bishop," in Massachusetts, laying the foundations in New England of the Congregational order of religion. It was, like the Episcopal Church, in other colonies, to become for a long period the Established Church

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in Massachusetts, and other Eastern colonies with the right of levying and collecting taxes for the support of Congregational churches, even from members of other communions, who thought it a hardship to be compelled to contribute to a second denomination. This tax was levied in Connecticut until 1780, and in Massachusetts as late as 1834. In 1802 Bishop Asbury was touring New England and mentions that at Needham, Massachusetts, George Pickering, who was with him, "stopped to demand (the return of) the church rates taken from the Methodists, amounting to one hundred dollars, or upward." These rates, he explains, "were for the support of the independent ministers, whose forefathers fled from Episcopal tyranny." Now their children's children were providing for "the support of the gospel by law."

Mighty men in church and state crowned the history of New England with imperishable glory, though the spirit of intolerance strangely beset the progress of religion, even under Puritan ascendancy, and persecution of Baptists and Quakers and "witches" attested a religious zeal for conformity which no age seems to have escaped.

The settlement of Manhattan Island early in the seventeenth century by people from Holland was not to escape persecution from the Old

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World. Lutherans and Reformed and Roman Catholics lived together in Holland without serious outbreaks. It was the West India Company of Amsterdam, with trade as its great motive, which was concerned in the settlement of New York. The island, the center of the metropolis of America, was purchased of the Indians for twenty-four dollars. It has the most valuable real estate on the continent. The original purchase price of Manhattan would not now buy a square inch on the narrowest street (Nassau) in the section where the Dutch reared their houses and shops. The names of the first ministers, Lutheran and Reformed, who served the little settlement on Manhattan and other beginnings on the Hudson and on Long Island are preserved in historical documents for the honor of all generations to come. But the names "New Amsterdam," soon to be changed by the English invaders to New York, and "New Netherland," embracing a strip of territory extending nominally to the northern border of Virginia, are among the things that are lost. The Dutch ministers were scholars and theologians, for Amsterdam, which had an influence on the development of three denominations in America—Lutheran, Reformed Dutch, and Reformed German—was a seat of learning. Probably Philip Embury, who came to New York with his Methodist class in 1760, and who was



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a Palatine, attended a Dutch Lutheran church for communion.

The Presbyterians—the Reformed Dutch and Reformed German churches belong to the great Presbyterian family—had supporters among the Puritans of New England and staunch followers among the Scotch-Irish immigrants who came from time to time from Ulster, Ireland. Churches of their order were to be found from New England to Georgia when the first Methodist Church was gathered in New York in 1766. It was chiefly in Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist churches that Whitefield carried on his evangelistic work. Jonathan Edwards and the Tennents, of New Jersey, were quite ready for hearty co-operation in his work, and a distinguished Presbyterian historian (Doctor Charles A. Briggs) calls that revival, which had a profound effect on Presbyterian, Congregational and other denominations, a part of “the great Methodist movement.” Francis Asbury often met Presbyterian ministers in his constant travels and preached in their churches, and heard them preach. Some of the discourses he heard impressed him as dry and learned, but others were full of life and power. On the whole, he was more partial to them than to any other denomination and gave Presbyterians preeminence in respectful treatment of ministers.



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The first Baptist Church in the colonies was organized by Roger Williams, a Puritan, in Providence, in 1639, after being baptized by immersion, and in turn baptizing the one who had baptized him and eleven others. Their views as to the subject and form of baptism gave rise to persecution in Massachusetts, Virginia, and elsewhere. But they increased, nevertheless, and had numerous churches when Methodism began its career. Their doctrinal views, especially their opposition to infant baptism, brought them into continuous controversy with other denominations, but they have grown immensely in numbers, and they and the Methodists share the honor of being the two most populous Protestant bodies in the United States. Baptists exist in three principal divisions, known as the Northern, the Southern and the National Convention, the latter consisting of Colored Baptists. Adhering closely to the congregational order, with no ecclesiastical power to enforce creeds or confessions, the loyalty and devotion of their vast aggregations of ministers and members to their doctrinal system is most remarkable.

The Friends, or Quakers, coming hither from England to escape persecution, were long in finding peace. Their view that the sacraments were not to be celebrated with any outward form, but to be observed inwardly and spiritually,

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naturally brought them into conflict with other denominations, and their refusal to do military duty or to take the civil oath made them appear as lacking in patriotism. Their ministers received no salary, and marriages were reduced to the simple form of the man and the woman taking each other as husband and wife, in the presence of members as witnesses. Even in Providence, where Roger Williams, under sentence of expulsion from Massachusetts, was standing for tolerance, there was no welcome for Quakers, even from Williams himself, who had a sharp controversy with them, calling them "rude," while they responded that he was "a bitter old man." Of course Friends and Baptists were particular advocates everywhere of religious liberty, in the full establishment of which they bore an important part.

A report made to the Bishop of London in 1761<sup>3</sup> stated that there were then in America 1,084,000 persons of all denominations, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, leaving only 60,000 unattached religiously. It would be interesting to learn how many this early census gave to each denomination. We know there were two dozen or more Methodists in New York in 1761, but how many, if any, elsewhere we do not know.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Pioneer Bishop, or The Life and Times of Francis Asbury*, William P. Strickland, p. 68.

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In 1775, fourteen years later, on the eve of the Revolution, when the population had increased to 2,640,000, there were 1,970 churches, of all denominations, and 1,461 ministers. The Congregationalists were first; the Baptists second, the Episcopalians third, and the Presbyterians fourth. Methodists were still one of the smaller bodies, insignificant in number and influence.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### MANNER OF ASBURY'S DAILY LIFE

FROM his *Journal* we get glimpses, but not full descriptions of Asbury's daily life. He had no time except for the briefest notes. Few entries are free from statements of unfavorable bodily conditions. He speaks often of high fevers, followed by profuse perspiration and chills, indicating the common ailment of those times, "fever and ague," or "chills and fever," on alternate days, caused by miasmatic conditions, a disorder which sapped the strength, brought on nausea, and gave great pain and distress and depression of spirits. Busy people yielded to these attacks only so long as extreme weakness compelled and were up and away as soon as possible. The disease was widespread and was generally deemed inevitable.

Intelligent care of the health was not one of the conscientious duties which pressed upon men's thought. Asbury, anxious as he was to "live to God and bring others so to do," and impatient of all hindrances to this divine work, rode through wind and rain, burning heat and

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icy blast, day and night; waited for dinner for hours; often did not apparently insist upon or even plan for a regular nightly rest; preached immediately at the end of wearisome journeys, often on an empty stomach, and yet trusted that God would in some miraculous way keep up his strength.

It was considered a sin to ruin the health of body and mind by drunkenness, or to bring life into jeopardy in a duel; but to lower the vitality of the physical system by overwork, by avoidable privation and exposure, by irregularity of diet and by filching hours from nightly rest which the laws of God ordain for human beings seems not to have been deemed wrong. Hygiene had not then formulated its laws and principles. How much pain and sickness Asbury might have escaped if the knowledge of to-day as to the proper care of the human organism had been as accessible to him as it is to us! But he probably did the best he could under the circumstances.

The medical treatment of colonial days was, of course, often ignorant and unskillful. Medicine had not then become a science. Asbury says (December, 1797) that the smallest exercise or application to study was too much for him. The doctor told him it was due to debility, and the patient was advised to take "more of the bark" (quinine), and fever powders. He also

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took a concoction consisting of a quart of hard cider, a hundred nails, some black snakeroot, fennel seed and wormwood. A wineglass full of this tonic was to be taken every morning for ten days, during which time the patient must touch no milk, butter, nor meat. Blood-letting was common for many diseases, and, of course, generally added to the debility. On another occasion when he had "putrid sore throat" he took physic, applied four blisters "that drew kindly," was bled from arm and tongue, and got relief sooner than he expected. He had quinsy—he did not call it that—several times and suffered greatly from it.

It goes without saying that Asbury only surrendered to sickness under compulsion. It is kindly intended by nature as a sign, or mentor, which ought to be heeded intelligently, but in his day it was generally resisted as long as failing strength permitted; and this is not an uncommon practice in this more enlightened age. Reviving strength always called Asbury promptly to resumption of active itinerant duties. Nor was he idle when kept indoors. If he had sufficient strength he worked on his *Journal*, or he studied, or he wrote letters, or he read. The list of books with which he became acquainted would make a respectable library, and he had a long and growing list of correspondents. When he could



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do nothing else he "wound broaches of cotton among the children." He could not be altogether idle. Dr. Charles A. Briggs, a Presbyterian biographer, speaks of this as a very pathetic spectacle. Worn by his magnanimous labors for others, he says, thinking not of himself, not able to read or study, forced to an idleness which could not even take thought of the many churches dependent upon him, this servant of God uses the little strength he has in winding cotton and speaking to children.

Much of Asbury's time and strength were taken up in his journeys. He was almost continually on the road. For the first few years after his arrival he went back and forth from Philadelphia, through New Jersey, to New York, South to Chester, Wilmington, Baltimore, and Virginia. Then his trips were extended southward through Virginia to the Carolinas and Georgia; eastward from New York through New England, northward through New York State to Canada, and then westward through Virginia to Tennessee and Kentucky and through Pennsylvania to Ohio and Indiana. During the period of his extremely busy life in America the population spread far and wide, and as Methodism followed the people, his journeys greatly increased in length from an average of 100 to 150 miles, to several hundred miles.

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Asbury speaks frequently in his *Journal* of the extent of his journeys. Near the end of 1780 he estimated that he had traveled in the previous six months 2,671 miles, at the rate of more than 5,000 miles a year, an average of about 14 miles a day. Ten years later, with his labors vastly increased as bishop, ordaining deacons and elders, baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper, Asbury had traveled, according to his computation, more than 2,500 miles in five months. In the early part of 1800 he was traveling at the rate of 550 miles a month. That fall, in the South, he traveled 1,000 miles in two months, much of it very difficult, attended twenty appointments and paid for expenses \$50. Though the continuous journeys he took cost him so great pain, distress, and weariness he was not content to live anywhere quietly; when years and infirmities increased he had no thought of retiring. "I hope," he says, "I shall travel as long as I live. Traveling is my health, life and all, for soul and body." And he had his wish, dying in Virginia, in 1816, on his way North.

There was not in that period much choice in methods of travel. The iron horse had not been invented to revolutionize civilization, and to reduce the time, labor, and weariness of long journeys. Man's most patient, faithful friend, the horse, was at once the fleetest and the surest

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carrier of passengers and freight. There were, of course, stage routes between important settlements like New York and Philadelphia; but those who had good saddle-horses preferred to make their own arrangements as to hours and rate of speed, using the space in saddlebags for changes of garments and such articles as they might wish to take with them.

Asbury used the stage often on his trips between New York and Philadelphia, but seldom without a sense of discomfort and dissatisfaction. His soul was vexed with the coarse, profane, and unprofitable conversation which he was compelled to hear. In one of these trips from Trenton to Philadelphia, 1772, he says, "I sat still as a dumb man, and as one in whose mouth there was no reproof." He adds, "They were so stupidly ignorant, skeptical, deistical, atheistical, that I thought if there were no other hell I would strive with all my might to shun that." These mixed companies, as he calls them, always taxed his patience, but he was timid and seldom felt free to remonstrate. On one occasion, waiting till nearly all the passengers had left, he spoke kindly to a young man about his freedom of speech and gave no offense. If Asbury could have adapted himself more readily to such circumstances, he could have won some of these rough fellow travelers. One of our modern preachers in the Far West,

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the Rev. Mr. Riggin, told me of interesting trips in stagecoach in Montana. On one occasion, a Sunday, with a crowd of rollicking passengers, after hearing their stories, often coarse and profane, and their worldly songs, he quietly began to fill a pause with "Rock of Ages," "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and other familiar hymns. The first verse they heard in silence, then one or two joined the singer and at last everybody sang heartily with him. Subsequent conversation showed that several had been members of church, and the talk became like confession at a class meeting.

Perhaps nine tenths of Asbury's journeys were with his own horse and saddle, and generally with a congenial traveling companion, with whom he could have as much or little conversation as the circumstances permitted or his inclination coveted. Among these helpful associates of the great pioneer were Freeborn Garrettson, Ezekiel Cooper, Henry Boehm, Jesse Lee, Nicholas Snethen, John Wesley Bond—all distinguished itinerants; also "Black Harry," a Negro with a gift of eloquence that made him very welcome not only to those of his own race but also to white audiences on occasion.

Later in life the pioneer bishop used a light carriage when too weak to sit in the saddle, but the rough roads made this method of travel too severe in the newer sections, and he preferred

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his saddle-horse—of which he had many in his long itinerancy—to vehicles. One of his horses, unknown to his rider, had been accustomed to the racetrack, and when the good bishop was journeying near the scene where “sons of Belial” had formerly trained his mount, the animal took the bit in his teeth and, dashing on the smooth circle, gave his astonished master a specimen of speed.

Doubtless Asbury did much thinking on horseback but little or no reading. He may have looked up and compared texts in his well-thumbed Bible, and arranged the heads of discourses in his mind while swinging along over level roads or smooth bridle paths; but a private room, when he could have it, or the quiet of the woods, was what he preferred for prayer and meditation. He regrets often that he has so little time. Riding, preaching, and class meeting leave but little opportunity, he says, for reading or writing and not always enough for prayer. If he could pore over a book on horseback, he said, as Wesley did in England, something would be gained; but “here the roads are too rough.” But one thing he could do while riding the long road, and that was to pray. It was his habit to have several ten-minute communings with God in each daily journey.

In various places in his *Journal* he speaks of



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the "present plan" of his daily life. In 1782 he writes: "I make it a rule to spend an hour, morning and evening, in meditation and in prayer for all the circuits, societies, and preachers." For some time he prayed for each church and itinerant by name, but as they grew numerous he could not keep up this practice. A few days after the above entry he was a guest in "a cabin with one room"; but there was a barn, and that was his "closet for prayer." At another time he had given himself to prayer for the work seven times a day. In three days, soon after, he had ridden one hundred miles, spent five hours in preaching as many sermons, ten hours in family and public prayer, and had read two hundred pages in Young's works. He was in the habit of visiting the sick and families in society, and attending class meeting. So far as possible he had prayer in families, in boarding houses, taverns, and elsewhere. He was examined in Philadelphia by the celebrated Doctor Rush and Doctor Physic. They would receive no pay, except "in prayers." The bishop, remarking that he did not like to be in debt, knelt then and there and prayed most impressively for God's blessing upon the practitioners.

The entertainment was often of the most primitive character. After spending three months on the frontiers (1801) he writes of the inconvenience of being in one room, with one fire-



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place, with half a dozen folks about you, some of the family—generally large in new countries—with a few strangers among them perhaps. “Here you must meditate, preach, read, write, pray, talk, eat, drink, sleep, or fly into the woods,” which the itinerant did whenever the weather conditions were favorable. His soul might be vexed with the unwisdom and thoughtlessness of preachers and people; he might be cramped in such crowded quarters; he might be disturbed by unjust criticisms and unreasonable complaints; but he loved the beauties of nature, of which he saw so much on the long road. In a moment of pleasant meditation he writes:

How sweet to me are all the moving and still-life scenes on every hand!—the quiet country houses, the fields and orchards bearing the promise of a fruitful year, the flocks and herds, the hills and vales and dewy meads, the gliding streams and murmuring brooks. How solacing after the turmoil of a busy city!

The man who can see with an appraising eye the glorious things which God, the Supreme Architect and Artist, spreads with lavish hand over earth, in sky, on sea, has resources of which neither envy, malice, nor distress can rob him.

Asbury often speaks of hunger on long trips when delays and other causes postponed dinner for hours and ravenous appetite could hardly be satisfied, but he kept up the habit of fasting for

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his soul's good. In 1795, while he was in Charleston, South Carolina, for several weeks, resting, reading, preaching, writing, he fasted, as usual, on a Friday, but remarks that he cannot fast oftener than "once a month," because it reduced his strength. Frequently he was obliged, he says, to live on a little bread and three or four cups of tea for eight or nine hours, while riding many miles and preaching and performing his ministerial labors. One would think there was enough enforced fasting without adding the voluntary practice. If he could have regular food and sleep, he added, he could stand the fatigue; but this was impossible under some circumstances. Later he complained that fasting brought on dejection of spirits. Of course, but it seemed not to occur to him that he could omit it.

When he had reached the age of fifty-two, in 1797, he wrote in his *Journal* that he could no longer spend ten out of sixteen hours in reading the Bible in English, or Hebrew, Greek or Latin, or other books, or write letters all day. His bow was weak, if not broken. But this, happily, gave him more time to speak to God and to souls, which was his main desire. What utter trust and devotion!

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### CHAPTER IX

#### ASBURY AS A PREACHER

**B**Y common consent George Whitefield was the greatest preacher Methodism has produced. He was a finished pulpit orator. He had the mysterious power to hold audiences in the grip of his eloquence. He could play upon their sensibilities as a great musician plays upon the organ or the violin. He knew how to touch their emotions and produce the smiles of joy or the tears of sorrow, the shout of victory or the groan of defeat. He could bend the will to glad submission or arouse it to stubborn resistance. He could lead men whither he would. He had a superb voice, with the range and flexibility of a violin, the variant tones of an organ, and its carrying power over great distances was marvelous. All its wonderful qualities were at his command. It is said that his simple enunciation of "Mesopotamia" could produce a thrill. Words came to his lips like troops to the bugle note; and, having as his theme the greatest issues known to man, with his own soul attuned to harmony with things divine, he delivered his message with the power of an inspired prophet, and obedience seemed the natural and necessary

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response. Pentecostal flames lighted his tours in America, and churches of all denominations were open to him. He was not one of the band of early Methodist itinerants, but his evangelistic tours prepared the way for them.

On the evening before his death he swayed a great audience for two hours, at Exeter, New Hampshire, then at his host's house at Newburyport, Massachusetts, as he was about to retire, a company gathered at the foot of the stairway, loath to say good night. He, standing upon an upper step, candle in hand, spoke to them, with a passion of love in his heart, until the tallow-dip burned to the socket, when he retired to his room. When morning dawned he was not, for God had taken him.

John Wesley, his associate in the Oxford Club and his lifelong friend, was a preacher of a different type. Not a natural orator, he was nevertheless no less effective as an evangelist, and his printed sermons have had millions of readers since his death, and exerted a lasting influence in Methodism. He was not an emotional nor a dramatic preacher, nor did he take such flights of imagination as Whitefield, but he had a wonderful power over audiences, and so pictured the devastating effects of sin and the recovering power of the gospel that men under conviction fell to the ground in paroxysms and cried out for

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mercy. Wesley never desired these effects, was disturbed by them, but knew not how to prevent them, without doing harm. He maintained dignity without stiffness, and spoke fluently, persuasively, fervently, and so simply and clearly that everybody could understand, the ignorant collier or costermonger as well as the educated hearer. His preaching was informed by a knowledge wonderfully comprehensive and accurate.

His moral power in the pulpit was immense. His brother-in-law, who afterward became a clergyman, heard him preach from his father's tombstone and wrote him that he had desired to speak to him afterward, but had not the courage to approach him, as "your presence creates an awe as though you were the inhabitant of another world." "The sight of you," he adds, "moves me strangely. My heart overflows with gratitude."

Whitefield was the herald awakening the slumbering conscience. Wesley bore the shepherd's crook, and sounded the shepherd's call, seeking the lost and bringing them back to the fold; leading the flock to green pastures, binding up their wounds, watching, warning, directing, and protecting them. Methodism might have been little more than a voice in the wilderness calling to repentance without his organizing, directing genius and his wise statesmanship to give it permanence.

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Francis Asbury was apparently the only man equal to the situation in America. Wesley left no successor in England of equal power with himself. Fortunately he had done his work so well that men of less genius could carry it on. Asbury had the unusual power of being able to project himself into the future of the church in the things that pertain to "its genius, government and institutions."<sup>1</sup> And his mind "was stamped upon its spirit and institutions as effectually as was that of Wesley upon English Methodism."<sup>2</sup> In other words, he was to American Methodism what Wesley was to English.

He could not have done these things if he had not been a preacher of more than ordinary power. He differed from Wesley as they both differed from Whitefield. Though not a college graduate with the wealth of learning that heightened the effectiveness of the father of Methodism, Asbury had by prodigious application become no mean scholar, and spoke with knowledge and authority in the pulpit. He had many qualities of mind and heart which go to the making of an effective preacher. Equipped with a clear, musical voice which could be stern with warning, firm with authority, soft with entreaty, melting with pathos,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Pioneer Bishop, or The Life and Times of Francis Asbury*, William P. Strickland, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.



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he had above all that close and constant communion with God which kept self in the background and the divine in control. He was a man of prayer. On his knees before retiring, on his knees again on rising, after breakfast, dinner and supper, in pastoral calls, on all occasions; on his knees when an abusive letter was received, he returned to his knees after he had read it.

When perplexed with momentous questions; when his own wisdom seemed unequal to the demand upon it, when unjustly assailed and wrongly accused, when misunderstood and misrepresented by friends and foes alike, when in peril of life and confronted by death, when his manifold burdens seemed greater than he could bear, he had recourse to prayer and poured out his soul before God. He was almost constantly besieging the throne of grace. Whether on horseback, in coach with godless men, in peril of Indians, or mobs, or storms, or floods, or what not, he sought earnestly the help of the Almighty, and did nothing without consulting him.

When he rose in the pulpit he was the prophet fresh from an audience with the King of kings, and spoke the message given him by his God. One of his traveling companions said, "He prayed the most and the best of any man I ever knew."<sup>3</sup>

He had a definite object in preaching—the

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<sup>3</sup> Freeborn Garrettson.

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saving of souls. He was like the fishermen of Galilee—instructed by the Master where and how to cast the net. If a sermon made no stir among the unconverted, brought conviction to no sinner, led to no decision, it had failed in its chief purpose. He was terribly in earnest. He was like one who in the night sees a house on fire and everybody within asleep. He must rouse them to their danger. Backsliders and indifferent believers must also be dealt with and the faithful exhorted to constant vigilance and service.

He followed Wesley's injunction to be the man of one book. He learned Hebrew and Greek after he came to America (how he ever found the time is a mystery), so that he might study the Word in the original tongues. He read it through again and again, read it also in Latin, memorized many passages so that he might use them at will and gave dignity, depth, and power to the message by interlarding it with telling texts. "Thus saith the Lord" answered all cavils, doubts, and disputations. He never was at a loss for an appropriate text when sudden exigencies arose. As he said himself, it is "of more consequence for a preacher to know his Bible well than all the languages or books in the world, for he is not to preach these, but the Word of God." Henry Boehm, long his traveling companion, says it was announced at a certain place before his arrival

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that he would preach from a particular text. He learned of this just as he went into the pulpit, and this was the text he took: "I speak not by commandment, but by reason of the forwardness of others, and to prove your sincerity and love."

Of course, he used testimonies he had heard in class, love feast, and prayer meetings, and his own was in constant evidence, to illustrate and enforce particular points, as the apostles did after receiving the power at Pentecost. Each became a witness. Why not? Witnesses in law are all important in establishing the truth; and by bearing witness the great historic facts of Christianity are to be made known. As Paul quotes, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."

Perhaps few men, so constantly before the public, have suffered more from natural timidity than Asbury. He speaks frankly of it in his *Journal*, and quite frequently. In one place his "mind was in chains"; in the next his soul was greatly blessed. On another occasion, he rode twenty miles through rain, and in fever, and preached with freedom. In Baltimore, he was so depressed by the condition of the people that preaching was "harder than servile work," and it was only his sense of duty that enabled him to go on. "An ignorant and proud company" so depressed his mind that he was "almost bereft

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of words," and was greatly troubled about it afterward. On his way to Burlington, New Jersey, his soul was filled "with holy peace"—a good preparation, it would seem, for his sermon; but he had "a dry and barren time," because he found the people had lost their first love. Again in Baltimore, after a delightful conversation with Otterbein,<sup>4</sup> a kindred soul, he had a good time preaching. He preached two hours at Perigau's, in Maryland, with delight. A few days later another congregation was "very dull" while he preached. Of a man's praise of his preaching in his presence he said it was a dangerous practice. It tended to make preachers think of themselves too highly, from which it may be inferred that he did not welcome it. To one appointment he went in "a heavy frame" and found his "ideas contracted" by the presence of deists in the audience.

He hesitated to preach in the Assembly Chamber in Annapolis because of the presence of unbelievers, but his heart "melted and expanded in love to the people." He had given himself to prayer seven times that day in preparation. At another time the congregation in Annapolis was small, he notes, "and so was my power to preach."

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<sup>4</sup> Philip William Otterbein, of the Reformed German Church, who became the founder of the United Brethren in Christ, and assisted at the ordination of Asbury.

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He speaks, a little later, about his work among the unawakened being "very heavy." Preaching to "a gay and giddy crowd," he noted that few were "serious and affected"; and later, to a company of three hundred in Virginia, among whom were "wicked whiskey drinkers," he had "little satisfaction."

And so runs his *Journal*. He seems never to have entirely outgrown his sense of discomfort in preaching to unsympathetic congregations and in churches of other denominations. The thought that people had come to criticize and treat the message and the man with scorn often caused him to have "a heavy time": of course, these were exceptions to the rule; and it must not be inferred these "dull times" were frequent. Sympathetic audiences made preaching a delight to him.

It is characteristic of his indomitable will that he would not let the comparatively few unpleasant experiences affect his sense of duty. He says: "I am willing to travel and preach as long as I live and I hope I shall not live long after I am unable to travel." He evidently needed audiences of believers and serious-minded people to bring out his strongest points as a preacher. It is probable that his conception of what sermons ought to be was so exalted that he felt dissatisfied when he did not measure up to his own high



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standard. It must not be inferred that his frank expressions about some of his pulpit efforts meant that he had actually failed, for he never hesitated to fill his appointments unless prostrated by illness. He judged himself more severely than his hearers did.

Thomas Ware, an itinerant preacher, who, himself, knew how to preach, wrote of Asbury that among the pioneers, he, by common consent, stood first. "There was something in his person," he said, "his eye, his mien and in the music of his voice which interested all who heard him. He possessed much natural wit, and was capable of the severest satire; but grace and good sense so far predominated that he never descended to anything beneath the dignity of a man and a Christian minister."

Nathan Bangs<sup>5</sup> heard Asbury preach in 1804. His "manner," he says, was "singularly imposing; he was grave and commanding, his voice sonorous, and his delivery attended with peculiar force. He seemed like a great military commander who had been crowned with many victories." He had (he was then fifty-seven) "lived the lives of half a score of ordinary men; his brow was indented, his face weather-worn, his locks gray," and he was the battle-scarred veteran of

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<sup>5</sup> A distinguished preacher and leader, book agent, secretary of the Missionary Society, and author of a history of the church.



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many conflicts. The growing host of itinerant preachers "beheld him with admiration and wonder"; like a flaming meteor, whose flashing light was to be seen, here, there, yonder, he sounded the trumpet of the gospel, and "hastened forward as if the final Judgment were about to break on the world." His sermon was quite discursive, abounding "in illustrations and anecdotes," and "sliding from one subject to another without system."

Henry Maynard, an itinerant who often saw and heard the great leader, whom all admired and revered, says as a preacher he was "dignified, eloquent, impressive." His sermons, characterized by "good sense and sound wisdom," were delivered with great authority and gravity, and often "attended with divine unction" as "refreshing as the dew of heaven." Referring to a sermon on union and brotherly love, he says "it was the greatest I ever heard on that subject." Another preacher states that Asbury "always preached to his text, never from it." Every proposition, argument, illustration, incident led directly to the selected passage.

Another witness, the Rev. Joseph Travis, of the Memphis Conference, says Asbury's style "was plain but chaste, his grammar correct, his arguments strong. He used frequently the *enthymeme*, a syllogism with the second clause

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omitted, as, "Seeing that we are mortal, we ought to be prepared for death." As a theologian "he had but few equals, if any superiors."

Henry Boehm, a traveling companion, who heard the bishop preach fifteen hundred times, says his sermons were "scripturally rich." He was a good Bible expositor, "giving the meaning of the writer and the mind of the Spirit." There was "a rich variety in his sermons" and "no tedious sameness." "He could be a son of thunder and of consolation.... He was great at camp meetings, on funeral occasions, and at ordinations."

Asbury said of himself once when his Conference cares had been dismissed he felt "uncommon light and energy in preaching," and added what might truthfully be said of him at all times: "I am not prolix; neither am I tame; I am rapid, and nothing freezes on my lips."

He was a preacher of apostolic power and faithfulness. He sounded the gospel trumpet with the energy, earnestness, and divine unction of Peter. He charged the multitude of young men entering the ministry, as Paul charged Timothy, that they "neglect not the gift" they had received; but "take heed unto" themselves and "unto the doctrine" and "continue in it, for in so doing" they should "both save" themselves "and them that hear." Like the loving disciple

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John, he knew how to encourage and comfort weary, troubled saints by holding up the glory which is to be revealed in them in the beautiful hereafter.

One can see from the record of texts used and the divisions of his discourses something of his method. Occasionally his themes were drawn from the prophecies and Psalms, but mostly from the Gospels and the Epistles. Early in his ministry here he preached on "the awful subject of the Judgment, endeavoring to prove that (1) it will be universal; (2) to describe the person of the Judge; (3) the awful events preceding and attending it; (4) the business of the day; (5) the decision and its consequences." In Maryland, at a quarterly meeting, he preached from Acts 20. 28, "Take heed unto yourselves," etc. His points were: 1. "Take heed to your spirits; 2. To your practice; 3. To your doctrine; 4. To the flock." Under the last point there were five subheadings, embracing the several classes in a congregation. To a large assemblage in a Virginia courthouse he preached concerning Peter's denial, showing 1. Peter's self-confidence; 2. How he followed afar off; 3. Mixed with the wicked; 4. Denied his discipleship and then his Lord.

In Providence, Rhode Island, where he was told how Gilbert Tennent, a Presbyterian evangelist, whom Asbury revered, came to the city to

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preach and how people were converted, he selected as an appropriate text Galatians 11. 14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," etc., his divisions being; 1. What it is to glory; 2. What things other than the cross men glory in; 3. What it is to glory in the cross; 4. One may know that he glories in the cross when like Paul he is crucified unto the world.

His favorite text was 1 Timothy 1. 15: "This is a faithful saying," etc. To a large congregation in Kentucky he preached acceptably on Hebrews 11. 4-8, about the fate of those who having tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, fall away. He endeavored to show: 1. How far believers may advance in grace; 2. How far they may apostatize; 3. The impossibility of recovery when they arrive at a certain degree of wickedness; 4. The only safe thing is to go on to perfection. On another occasion his sermon was based on Philemon 11, 12, 13, about "working out your own salvation." His points were: 1. Those addressed were believers; 2. About salvation—avoid legality, antinomianism, lukewarmness; 3. God works in them to resist temptation, to sanctify, and finally save; 4. They should work out their own salvation through every means of grace; 5. With fear, where many have failed, with trembling where many

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have fallen. Some Calvinists, he says, were not pleased.

It appears to have been the custom in the days of Asbury and for years afterward, where more than one preacher was present, to follow the sermon with an exhortation. In Maryland, he preached after a love feast, "with some freedom," and Freeborn Garrettson "exhorted long," dealing with particular cases of conscience, and speaking of Christ and heaven and hell, and carrying "all before him." On another occasion, also in Maryland, they had a love feast, then preaching, and finally a watch-night service, in which five or six preachers took part. A little later at a Quarterly Conference Asbury preached and Garrettson and Ruff exhorted.

The great purpose of the sermon being to awaken sinners and lead them to decision, the exhortations were naturally directed to this end and had a cumulative effect, for congregations were willing to stay and listen for hours.

As a preacher Asbury sounded the gospel trumpet with the energy, earnestness, and divine unction of a Peter, and sinners were cut to the heart by the sword of the Spirit. He encouraged and comforted weary, troubled saints by glimpses of the heavenly rewards that await the faithful; and he charged the young preachers, as Paul charged Timothy, with solemnity and power, as

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a father in the gospel. Remembering that in his continuous service from October, 1771, to March, 1816, he must have preached many thousand times, always that he might bring sinners to Christ, with thousands of souls as his hire, he must surely be accounted a great preacher.



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### CHAPTER X

#### THE ORGANIZING CONFERENCE

**T**HE close of the Revolutionary War meant not only the independence of the American colonies and the admission of the United States to the family of nations, but the sundering of ecclesiastical ties as well. No one saw more clearly than John Wesley what this involved. He knew by letters from Asbury that the Methodist societies must have the sacraments in a regular way, or they would provide themselves with them in an irregular way, as had already been attempted in the South. Consequently, he conferred with Thomas Coke in February, 1784, five months after the Treaty of Peace had been ratified, and told him of Asbury's request that he would provide some mode of church organization for the Methodist societies in America "suitable to their need." This, he said, he had now decided to do, and the great leader proceeded to unfold the principles of the plan he had in view, which was modeled on that of the Church of Alexandria, in primitive times, where the presbyters, on the death of a bishop, exercised the right of ordaining another from their own

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body. He proposed to consecrate Dr. Coke, already a presbyter, as superintendent to serve in America. The latter was startled and doubted the validity of Wesley's authority. After two months' reflection, however, he yielded, and went to Bristol, after the Annual Conference, to receive the greater powers offered him. At Bristol, Wesley, assisted by Coke and another friendly clergyman, James Creighton, ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as presbyters, and then Coke was consecrated as superintendent.

The three came to America, bearing a letter from Wesley in which he set forth that the urgent conditions in the United States had led him providentially, seeing no other way, to set apart Coke as superintendent, with a further letter addressed to "Doctor Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our Brethren in North America," in which the father of the movement calls attention to the "very uncommon train of providences" which have separated the colonies composing the United States from the mother country, and also annulled ecclesiastical authority over American bodies. He had long believed that presbyters and bishops were of the same order and had often been asked to ordain traveling preachers in Great Britain, but had refused, being unwilling to violate the order of the Established Church. Conditions were different in America, which had no bishops

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or parish ministers, and his scruples accordingly here ended. He had, therefore, "appointed Doctor Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America." Further, he offered a liturgy he had prepared and advised that it be used by the traveling preachers in Sunday service, reading the litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays and praying extemporaneously on all other days. This remarkable, statesmanlike letter, which has withstood severe criticism from many sources, closed with these sentences:

As our American brethren are now totally disentangled from both state and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again. . . . They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free."

This letter was not the product of senility, as some unfriendly critics, including a few Methodists, hastened to say; but of a sound mind in a sound body, even at the age of eighty-two. For many years he had believed that presbyters and bishops were of the same order in apostolic times and that a bishop was simply president of a body of presbyters, all one order, with two offices.

The English delegation arrived in New York in November, and made their way leisurely to Judge Bassett's in Delaware. Coke preached on



BARRATT'S CHAPEL IN DELAWARE  
Where Asbury and Coke First Met



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Sunday in Barratt's Chapel and administered the communion. Afterward, as stated in Drew's *Life of Coke*, "a plainly dressed, robust, but venerable-looking man was seen moving through the congregation and making his way to the pulpit. On ascending the pulpit he clasped the doctor in his arms and, without making himself known by words, accosted him with the holy salutation of primitive Christianity. The venerable man was Mr. Asbury," who, by the way, was only thirty-nine years of age.

Asbury was amazed at seeing Whatcoat pass the cup, not knowing that he had been ordained. He was "shocked" at first at the errand of Coke, and declared he would not serve unless unanimously chosen by the brethren. He did not like sudden changes, suddenly announced. Fifteen preachers were present, and it was agreed that a General Conference should be called to meet in Baltimore on Christmas. Notice was sent South by Freeborn Garrettson. Asbury laid out an itinerancy of a thousand miles for Coke to follow the six intervening weeks, appointing Harry Hosier, his Negro companion, an eloquent preacher, to be Coke's guide.

Sixty preachers assembled for the Conference. After the reading of Wesley's letters, Asbury says, "It was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal Church, and to have superintendents, elders,



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and deacons.” Whatcoat’s account is fuller, mentioning that Wesley’s liturgy was accepted, the sacraments to be administered and persons to be ordained, after election by Conference, the form of ordination to be that prescribed in Wesley’s prayer book.

Asbury was ordained deacon on the second day, elder on Sunday and bishop on Monday, Coke, assisted by Vasey, Whatcoat and Otterbein, conducting the last ceremony, both Coke and Asbury having been elected by the Conference. Wesley knew the preachers wanted Asbury for general superintendent. Among the letters sent him was one by Edward Dromgoole, under date of May 24, 1783, in which he said:

The preachers at present are united to Mr. Asbury and esteem him very highly in love for his work’s sake, and earnestly desire his continuance on the continent during his natural life; and to act as he does at present, to wit, to superintend the whole work and go through all the circuits once a year. He is now well acquainted with the country, with the preachers and with the people, and has a large share in the affections of both. Therefore they would not willingly part with him.<sup>1</sup>

Ordinations of the preachers as deacons and elders were numerous, so that when the Conference broke up every charge represented received an ordained man, and there was general rejoicing.

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<sup>1</sup> *Centennial History of American Methodism*, John Atkinson, p. 27.

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The Conference adopted "the discipline which was substantially the same with the large minutes, the principal alterations being only such as were necessary to adapt it to the state of things in America."<sup>2</sup> It also agreed to acknowledge the authority of John Wesley during his lifetime and "in matters of church government to obey his commands"—a rather hasty promise. It forbade traveling ministers to drink spirituous liquors, except medicinally, and fixed the duties of superintendents. They were to ordain superintendents, elders and deacons, to preside in Conferences, to fix the appointments, to change, receive, suspend preachers in the interval of the Conferences and to receive and decide appeals from preachers and people. Several provisions relating to superintendents, elders and deacons, and to "extirpate the abomination of slavery" were adopted. The latter were modified, to some extent, by postscripts, allowing the brethren in Virginia two years to adjust themselves to the new conditions and suspending the operation of the regulations in States whose laws were opposed to them.

Wesley's liturgical service was used for a while, the elders appearing in gowns and bands, but to many worshipers the reading was tedious (a Louisiana Negro who joined the Protestant Episcopal Church said, "Dey takes too much time

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<sup>2</sup> *History of Discipline*, Robert Emory.

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readin' de minutes of de previous meetin'"), the order difficult to learn, and the taste for extempore prayer so well fixed that the democratic way was soon restored. Wesley's changes in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, omitting fourteen of them, changing others slightly, were accepted, the Conference adding one for the President, Congress, etc. The elimination was supposed to rid the symbol from traces of Romanism and Calvinism.

The people had been so long without the Lord's Supper, and so many converts and infants had been deprived of baptism, withal the scattered societies, with no ecclesiastical order, no automatic power, no ministers, no sacraments, no right to be called churches, no place of dignity among the denominations, were so helpless in their new isolation that the news of their organization and investment with all the powers and dignities of a Church of Christ filled every breast with feelings of holy joy. Wesley had done a great, a wonderful thing for them in a large-hearted way, and the Conference with equal generosity recognized it in a resolution which afterward was to cause some trouble, as Asbury naively admits: "I sat mute and modest," he says, when they passed the resolution, though he deemed the promise to obey in governing matters a man three thousand miles away unwise;

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and was "mute and modest" later when it was rescinded.

The preachers called "assistants," in charge of circuits, were ordained as elders, and those called "helpers," also a Wesley term, as deacons. The Minutes of the Conference give a list of twenty elders and thirty-five deacons and the names of Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury appear at the head as superintendents. A footnote to the word "superintendents," made by Asbury, runs thus: "As the translators of our version of the Bible have used the English word *Bishop* instead of *Superintendent*, it had been thought by us that it would appear more scriptural to adopt their term *Bishop*." In the *Minutes* of 1788 the word "bishops" is first used instead of "superintendents" in connection with the names of Coke and Asbury. The next year it disappeared. In 1790 John Wesley's name stands first and Coke's and Asbury's names second and third as exercising "the episcopal office in Europe and America." Wesley's scathing letter to Asbury about the use of the term "bishop," wherein that great man appeared at great disadvantage, doubtless led the American to drop temporarily the perfectly simple and appropriate title, implied by the name "Methodist Episcopal Church." But what provoked the ire of Wesley was the comparison it would suggest with bishops of the

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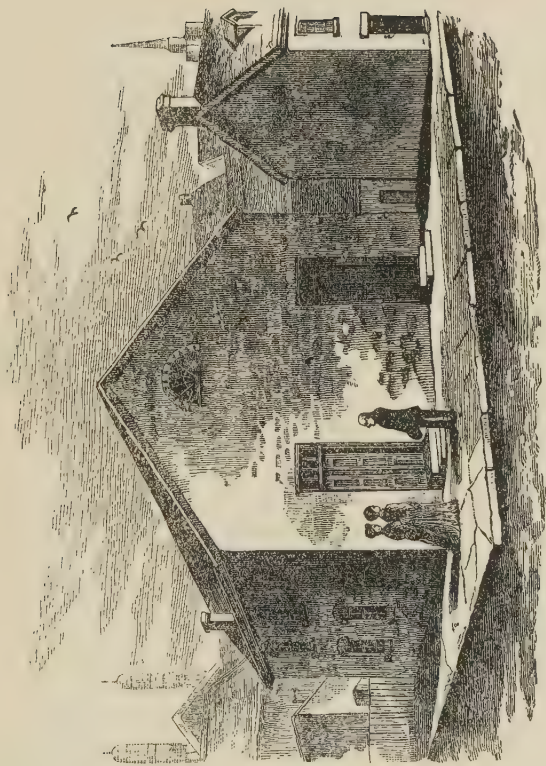
Church of England. He declared with unwonted heat that men might call him knave or scoundrel, but never bishop. Before he died, however, he was not only reconciled to but defended the use of "bishop" in America.

The preachers prominent in the Christmas Conference, besides Coke and Asbury, were Free-born Garrettson, born in Maryland, converted at an early age, admitted on trial in 1773, a fine preacher, a strong friend, and a Christian gentleman, whose career, like the path of the just, was "a shining light, increasing more and more unto the perfect day";<sup>3</sup> Richard Whatcoat, afterward to become a bishop, of whom it was said at his consecration, "Never were holy hands laid on a holier head"; Thomas Vasey, also ordained by Wesley with Whatcoat; James O'Kelly, who was to lead the first secession from the newly organized church; William Watters, of Maryland, the first native-born itinerant. These and other preachers took part in the most important event that had yet occurred in American Methodism. And yet the list of its members and even the date of its meeting are disputed questions. Its *Minutes*, as printed under Asbury's direction, say it was held in January, 1785; the date of its adjournment seems to have been January 1. Some

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<sup>3</sup> *A History of Methodists in the United States*, James M. Buckley, p. 171.





LOVELY LANE MEETING HOUSE  
Where the Christmas Conference Met





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authorities fix on Christmas Day as the beginning of its session; others on December 24. The original *Minutes*, printed by John Dickins in 1795, covering the Conferences from 1773 to 1794 inclusive, call the Conferences held in 1786 and 1787 General Conferences, from which we must conclude, not that all the preachers assembled in one Conference in those two years, but that Francis Asbury was an extremely busy man and made mistakes occasionally to prove that he was human.

According to the *Minutes* there were 18,000 in society at the time of the General Conference, with 20 elders, including two from Antigua, West Indies, and James Cromwell, of Nova Scotia, and 85 others, some of whom became deacons. Thus there were of itinerants, besides the two bishops, 105, at the end of 1784. The next year they had increased to 118, and the members had grown to 20,681.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, now in full commission, with all necessary organization and authority, was ready to enter upon a career unparalleled in the history of the Church of Christ, with a leader adequate to all the demands that a fast developing organization, under Divine Providence, was to make on him.

In some respects the ecclesiastical system adopted was unique: 1. The itinerancy which,

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combined with the circuit plan, made the largest possible use of a limited supply of preachers. It had disadvantages, as the settled pastorate also has, but without it Methodism could not have had the phenomenal growth which has characterized it; 2. The supervisory method, embracing (a) itinerant bishops, not diocesan nor of a separate order, as in the Anglican Communion, but of the body of presbyters, or elders, with a different office. They traveled throughout the church, holding Annual Conferences, ordaining and appointing preachers, selecting presiding elders, participating in the administration of the denominational boards, constituting a strong, united body of leaders; (b) presiding elders, sub-bishops over Annual Conference districts, who looked after the interests of a limited number of ministers and churches and advised with the bishop in making the appointments. Bishops and district superintendents, as they are now called, are of great help in the missionary enterprise at home and abroad, and are in almost everything leaders and advisers. The General Conference, composed, since 1872, of both ministerial and lay representatives, is the supreme legislative and judicial body of the church and exercises control over the bishops, whose character and administration are subject to its examination and whose places of residence are determined by it.

# IN MAKING OF AMERICAN METHODISM

## CHAPTER XI

### AS A PROJECTOR OF CHURCH INSTITUTIONS

A RECENT book<sup>1</sup> speaks of Methodism as a world religion, and as such essentially missionary. And yet it is not a new religion but the old religion—that of Christ and his apostles—rediscovered and applied in a modern age. New only as an organization, providential in its development, Methodism has no “Thus-saith-the-Lord” for its forms or formularies, though defending them as in general harmony with the apostolic church. It only claims divine power for that which constitutes its life force.

Methodism was a world force from the beginning because it had the missionary spirit. “Amongst the larger Protestant Churches the Methodist communion is that which alone, from the outset and distinctly, adopted a world-wide aim. It addressed the message of Christ to the individual man as the only way to reach through him to mankind.”<sup>2</sup> Doctor Findlay says “the

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Wesleyan Missionary Society*, G. G. Findlay. Five Volumes. London, The Epworth Press.

<sup>2</sup> Review of G. G. Findlay's first two volumes in *The Christian Guardian*, January 3, 1923, Toronto, Canada.

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world expansion of Protestantism commenced from this date." Dr. Thomas Coke, clergyman of the Church of England, appointed as superintendent of the societies in America, with Asbury, embodied the early missionary impulse of Methodism. Wesley sent him to America, but he could not be confined to any continent. After he had been driven from Petherington, where he was serving as curate and preaching the doctrines of Methodism, which he had received from Thomas Maxfield, Wesley's first lay preacher, he was a world character. The rector of the church could dismiss him, and the church itself could drive him away "amid the ringing of church bells, whilst the rabble were regaled with hogsheads of cider," and provided themselves "with hampers of stones" to hasten his departure; but neither bishop nor rector nor members nor rabble could bring him back when their eyes were opened to see that "the poor had lost their benefactor, the people their pastor, the sick their comforter, and the wicked the only person that kept them in awe." Their repentance came too late. "We chimed him out," they said, and they were ready to atone for their folly "by ringing him in"; but God had provided better and bigger things for him. He was to make many trips to America, to preside at the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to establish Methodism in the

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West Indies, to plan in 1784 for the organization of a "Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathen," and to sail himself, with six others, for India to begin the work, dying on shipboard and being buried in the Indian Ocean with the "spicy breezes . . . from Ceylon's Isle," as his requiem. His missionary plan, approved by Wesley, antedates Carey's appeal by eight years, and the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Church Missionary Society.

This was the same year he came to America, bringing Wesley's letter authorizing the organization of the societies into an independent church, and providing for the ordination of Asbury, at the hands of Coke, as deacon, elder, and superintendent. This was the chief work he had to do on this side of the sea; henceforth he was to busy himself chiefly with plans for world missions.

Bishop Asbury's mind, says Doctor Strickland, "was stamped upon the genius and institutions of American Methodism as effectually as was that of Wesley upon English Methodism,"<sup>3</sup> and he adds: "No man ever lived who projected himself further into the future of all that pertains" to the Church's "genius, government and institutions than did Asbury." One cannot write of the

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<sup>3</sup> *The Pioneer Bishop, or the Life and Times of Francis Asbury*, William P. Strickland, p. 184.



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Methodist Missionary Society, which was not organized until after his death; nor of the Book Concern; nor of the American Bible Society, nor of the Board of Education for Negroes, nor of the Board of Sunday Schools, nor of the Board of Conference Claimants, without mentioning the work Francis Asbury did for all these causes. His mind is stamped on all these institutions. He saw them in the future with the eye of a prophet and projected them. He came himself as a missionary to America, and he did not forget that the first missionaries, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, who preceded him, brought the proceeds of a missionary collection by the English Conference, for the American societies. In his *Journal* under date of August 1, 1815, within eight months of his death, on his way across the Alleghanies to hold the Ohio Conference, Asbury speaks of hearing the plea of a Baptist missionary for foreign missions. He writes, "We labor for those at home." As he heard the plea of the Baptist brother he thought he might help, and so rose and related a conversation with a London Methodist a few years ago, in which the English brother complained that Methodists and others in England had given so largely for foreign missions. "I observed," said the bishop, "that the Methodist preachers who had been sent by John Wesley to America

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came as missionaries. Some of them returned; but not all. And now behold the consequences of this mission. We have seven hundred preachers and three thousand local preachers who cost us nothing. We will not give up the cause, we will not abandon the world to infidels. We will not give up that which we know to be glorious until we see something more glorious." This shows that in those early days of missionary enterprise this great Methodist itinerant had the world vision of "Christ for the world and the world for Christ."

More than thirty years before the Missionary Society was formed Francis Asbury was prosecuting as vigorously as possible home missionary work. In Baltimore, in April, 1786, he says he spoke three times and took a collection "to defray the expense of sending missionaries to the Western settlements"—across the Alleghanies. At the Council held in Baltimore, in 1789, he says, "I collected about £28 for the suffering preachers in the West." The following year in Tennessee he found "the poor preachers indifferently clad, with emaciated bodies and subject to hard fare." In Kentucky he found still more primitive conditions. Few houses, "steep hills, deep rivers, muddy creeks; a thick growth of reeds for miles together, and no inhabitants but wild beasts and savage men." He held a Conference in "a

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very comfortable house," not far from a place where a massacre of twenty-four persons by Indians had taken place not long before. He ordained three elders and mixed with Conference proceedings were sermons, conversions and reclamations. His soul was blessed among "these people," he was "exceedingly pleased" with them. And at that Conference in the wilderness the bishop writes, "We fixed a plan for a school and called it Bethel, and obtained a subscription of upward of £300 in land and money for its establishment." Surely, this was new missionary territory, and it had larger prospects than its condition would seem to warrant.

In 1792 at a Conference in Albany, New York, the bishop says:

"We appointed Jonathan Newman a missionary to the whites and Indians on the frontiers. We also sent another to Cataraqui [Cattaraugus?]. At the Baltimore Conference in 1790 a collection of over £72 was divided among the needy brethren in Ohio [two thirds] and those in Kentucky [one third]."

The West and Southwest were new territory, and people from the seaboard States rushed to Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri and Mississippi, after the French and Indian War, and sought the rich land opened up for settlement.

The early itinerants in the West had long and

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arduous circuits to travel, requiring four to six weeks to compass. In 1800 Henry Smith's circuit "covered all southern Ohio between the Ohio and Scioto Rivers." Benjamin Lakin had a circuit in northern Kentucky "extending from Maysville to the Licking River" and William Burke had one in central Kentucky a hundred miles long. "James B. Finley's first circuit, the Wills Creek, was four hundred and seventy-five miles around." The first man west of Indiana had the whole of Illinois for his circuit, and another was assigned to Missouri as his field. Tobias Gibson had preaching places on the lower Mississippi distributed over a territory several hundred miles in length, and Elisha Bowman "covered a territory equally large, after the Louisiana Purchase."<sup>4</sup>

Surely, this wilderness was missionary ground, and never were self-supporting missions more terribly pressed by the wolf. The salary of a preacher was sixty-four dollars a year from 1784 to 1800. In 1792 traveling expenses were added, and in 1800 the annual pay was fixed at eighty dollars and traveling expenses. Circuit riders, presiding elders, and bishops all had the same salary. There was no distinction or discrimination. Either salary, the smaller or the larger,

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<sup>4</sup> *The Rise of Methodism in the West*, William Warren Sweet, pp. 41, 42.

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was pitifully small; but often the poor preacher was short of the designated sum. Single men were preferred; but married men could not be refused and their families had "short commons." The frontier log cabins, of generally one room, had only homemade furniture and little of that. The bedsteads were stationary, "fastened to the sides of the cabin." They were without springs, and for years without feather beds.

No wonder Bishop Asbury gave to the uncomplaining heroes in the Western wilderness all of his own clothing he could spare—his watch, his coat, and his shirt. Professor Sweet says the salaries were paid in cash, in cloth, in corn, leather, linen, shoes, socks, etc., anything the contributors could spare, and nearly everything could be turned to good account by the preachers.

Among the plans of Bishop Asbury for helping distressed ministers and wives and children of ministers, all truly missionary, was a form of mite subscription, which he seems to have carried about with him. The last one, entitled "Mite Subscription Opened and Continued for the Year 1816," with his own subscription at the head, has been preserved and is among the treasures in possession of Drew Theological Seminary Library.<sup>5</sup> No person could give more than one

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<sup>5</sup> A facsimile of it is given in *Francis Asbury, The Prophet of the Long Road*, Ezra Squier Tipple.



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dollar and some gave as little as an old-fashioned shilling, twelve and one half cents, or even a fi'-penny-bit ("fip"), six and one quarter cents. Part of the proceeds of the subscription for 1816 were to be used to send missionaries to the German, French, and Spanish populations. The great itinerant had a list with him in 1815 and he notes in South Carolina, "we collected liberally on the mite subscription to help the suffering ministry." In Ohio he speaks of visiting from house to house with his mite list, and notes that the people seemed glad to subscribe. At the Ohio Conference a month later the proceeds helped in relieving the preachers. The General Conference of 1812 authorized Annual Conferences to raise funds for "missionary purposes," at Asbury's request.

If this great and good pioneer could have lived three or four years longer, he would have seen the organization of the Methodist Missionary Society and would have chosen to be one of its organizers and promoters. It began at once to help missions at home, but more than a decade passed before it had a mission abroad. The receipts of the first year were only \$823.04, of which but \$85.76 was called for, leaving about ninety per cent of the year's income as a balance in the treasury, a condition which was never to occur again. The early reports of the Society,



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written by Nathan Bangs, are of great interest even in this day of great and increasing missionary operation. The second annual report observes that the "success of missionary exertions has answered every objection which the ingenuity of men could raise against the cause."<sup>6</sup> The same report speaks of missionary work among the French and Indians, and adds these prophetic and discriminating words concerning the evangelization of the Indians: "The design is worthy of the apostles, and it will require the zeal of the apostles to accomplish it." An even more notable forecast was given in these words: "The history of Methodism in the four quarters of the world will exhibit a success unparalleled by anything since the apostolic age." Written years before our first foreign mission had been established, this prediction has already become history. In the year 1922 of the total membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 4,593,540, about 566,700 were in our foreign missions; that is, more than twelve per cent of the lay members of the church were in the continents of Africa, Asia, South America, North America (Mexico), and Europe.

In Sunday-school work no other Protestant body equals the Methodist Episcopal Church, in

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<sup>6</sup> *Missionary Growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, H. K. Carroll, p. 13.

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the number of its enrollment—4,848,091 (1922), which is larger than its total membership by 254,551; and it is from the Sunday school, in these modern days, when the old methods of evangelism are being abandoned, that the church gets recruits for its membership. The Sunday school is the open door of the church, and of incalculable value. Bishop Asbury with far vision saw the importance of providing for the care of the children and held the first Methodist Sunday school in America at the house of Thomas Crenshaw, Hanover County, Virginia, in 1786. Doctor Buckley thinks this was the first Sunday school in the New World;<sup>7</sup> but, according to an article by Dr. E. W. Rice,<sup>8</sup> an excellent authority, there were a number of isolated Sunday schools in America as early as the seventeenth century. Asbury's Virginia Sunday school seems to have been the first Methodist Sunday school in America, unless John Wesley's school in Georgia, held on Sunday, is entitled to be called such. It is quite probable that Asbury was led to adopt the new institution by reading an account in the *Arminian Magazine*, for January, 1785, by Robert Raikes, of how he came to open the first Sunday school in England. Wesley saw at once the value of

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<sup>7</sup> *A History of Methodists in the United States*, James M. Buckley, p. 271.

<sup>8</sup> *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia*, vol. XI, pp. 151-164.

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the idea, and Wesleyan Methodism had a notable Sunday school at Bolton le Moors, begun before April, 1786. The Sunday school which Asbury established at the house of Thomas Crenshaw continued many years, and a colored man by the name of John Charleston, who was a member of it, became a preacher. Friends raised money and purchased his liberty, after which he was ordained deacon by Bishop McKendree, and served many years most faithfully and efficiently.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of gathering the children together on Sunday for instruction in the fundamentals and in the Bible and religion commended itself for many reasons. Four years after the starting of the Asbury school in Virginia, 1790, the Conferences discussed the subject and approved the organization of such schools. In the minutes the following question and answer appeared for the first time:

**Ques.** What can be done to instruct poor children, white and black, to read?

**Ans.** Let us labor as the heart and soul of one man to establish Sunday schools in or near the place of public worship. Let persons be appointed by the bishops, elders, deacons, or preachers to teach gratis all that will attend and have a capacity to learn, from six o'clock in the morning till ten, and from two o'clock in the afternoon till six, where it does not interfere with public worship. The Council shall compile a proper schoolbook to teach them learning and piety.

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<sup>9</sup> *Centennial History of American Methodism*, Atkinson, p. 175.

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In those days there were no free schools and poor parents could not always pay to have their children taught. Free Sunday schools would, therefore, be popular, it was supposed, but most of the illiterates were Negroes, and their parents were backward about sending them. Therefore the schools did not simply teach reading but endeavored to train in piety and biblical knowledge. Now the kindergarten constitutes a particular attraction for the little folks, and Bible training is the feature of greatest value. Asbury saw but little of the development which has made this institution what it is, but he appreciated the importance of teaching the plastic minds of children the things pertaining to the life that now is and the life which is to come, and constantly sought in his travels to interest and instruct them. The Conferences of 1787 took action to the effect that children be placed in classes for weekly instruction and when awakened be admitted to the society. This was an advance step.

The Bible to the early Methodist itinerants was the one indispensable book. Second to it was the *Discipline*, and then Wesley's *Sermons* and *Notes*. Around the Word of God as the center were gathered other publications necessary and helpful, and, of course, class leaders must have it, and all others who would be intelligent

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disciples of the Divine Master. Asbury did what he could to circulate the Book. He became a member of the first American Bible Society, in Philadelphia, and taking supplies of the book in his saddlebags on his travels, distributed them widely. It was not for years easy to get Bibles. It was considered so important that the people should be able to secure them that the United States Congress ordered at public expense the importation of twenty thousand copies.

Bishop Asbury also busied himself with the compilation of a hymn book. He mentions the fact that he had taken two hundred hymns from the Congregational hymn book to put in a new American edition, and a month or two later he was selecting scriptural texts to insert with the new hymns in the enlargement "of our common hymn book." The Methodists have always taken great interest in congregational singing. The two Wesleys and other Methodists have furnished, in common with all evangelical Christians, many of the choicest spiritual songs. But American Methodists are not abreast of the English Methodists in the use of hymns. The latter have at least five numbers in Sunday worship. We are content with three, and the three are often abbreviated. Little is said as to Asbury's singing, but most of his associate itinerants knew how to lead, and often began their

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informal services by an unannounced solo. No denomination has made more use of hymns than Methodists.

By common consent the best minds would doubtless agree that the success of Methodism has been achieved in large measure by extensive use of the press. Books and periodicals bear silent messages, but they bear them effectively and bear them to persons and places where the voice of the preacher is seldom or never heard. Methodism owed its abundant and influential literature most of all to John Wesley, whose sermons and notes and hymns, his magazine and the numerous books he edited and prepared for larger usefulness than they could have had without the touch of his facile and learned pen, have wielded a vast power for good over uncounted multitudes. One of the first English missionaries (Robert Williams) who came to America brought Wesley's publications with him, or had them reprinted here, and found a ready sale for them. At the first Conference in 1773 this practice was forbidden and under Asbury's wise foresight the right and privilege was reserved to the denomination, the profits not to go to any individual, but to the itinerant preachers as a body. Almost from the first the itinerants were the agents for the sale of the denominational literature. Abel Stevens, the accomplished his-



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torian of Methodism, in noting an action of the English Wesleyan Conference of 1749, that returns should be made quarterly from each society to the Quarterly Conference for books, says:

Thus began that organized system of book and tract distribution which has secured to Methodism a more extensive use of the religious press than can be found in any other Protestant denomination of our day.<sup>10</sup>

Asbury appointed John Dickins as the first agent of The Methodist Book Concern, gave his *Journal* to the new institution for publication, and edited the *Minutes*, the *Discipline*, hymn book, and other works, for the same end. Out of a small and insignificant beginning it has become the largest publishing business, perhaps, in the world, its average annual sales amounting to \$3,500,000. Its profits have gone for the benefit of the itinerancy.

It was also Bishop Asbury who anticipated the Tract Society. He proposed in 1808 that one thousand dollars be appropriated from The Book Concern for the printing and free circulation of religious tracts. In 1817 some New York women organized a Tract Society which eventually became the Tract Society of the denomination.

The time would fail to show how strong was

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<sup>10</sup> *History of Methodism*, Abel Stevens, vol. I, p. 326.

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the influence of this great pioneer in promoting the cause of temperance, in Annual Conference action as early as 1780, against the making, selling, using of intoxicants; against the holding of slaves by the preachers and members, and in raising funds annually for superannuated preachers and the widows and orphans of preachers. The church has never failed since this fund was begun through Asbury's influence to make provision, however inadequate, for this honorable purpose.

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### CHAPTER XII

#### HIS GOVERNING CAPACITY

**Q**UITE the equal of John Wesley was the pioneer of American Methodism in administrative and executive ability, and this is a high estimate, if we accept Stevens' favorable comparison of the English leader with Richelieu, the French cardinal-premier. Coming to America an unknown youth, Asbury had to make his way among the weak, scattered societies by his own wisdom, scant experience, and strength of mind and personality. He did not even have the advantage of a commendatory letter from John Wesley, who, when later he commissioned George Shadford, wrote in a cheerful strain, "I let you loose, George, on the great continent of America" to "publish your message in the open face of the sun" and to "do all the good you can." When Asbury and Shadford met they became fast friends and the former writes of their delightful, open-minded conferences. In this quick recognition of Shadford's qualities he showed that necessary element of leadership which accurately measures the strength and weaknesses of men. Those most familiar with him

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say his estimate of the preachers, whom he always appointed solely on his own judgment, without consultation with the presiding elders, was seldom wrong. He had an eye that seemed to search the depths of the personalities and discover hidden powers and frailties. As his responsibility for stationing the itinerants covered a period of more than thirty years, in which he ordained over four thousand men, his knowledge of their individual qualities and abilities must have been pretty accurate to escape serious consequences.

There was another characteristic of Asbury very desirable in those having authority to govern others: he first learned to govern himself. He was neither hasty nor impatient in dealing with men. Those who rush to conclusions and to their expression, show want of self-control. This man could see beneath the masks most people wear, but by no change of countenance or bearing did he reveal what he saw. He constantly prayed for patience, and cultivated it, knowing that no man is entire master of himself who loses that humble but precious quality. His *Journal* shows that he sought to curb his tendency to impatience. All agree that he was a man of solemn cast of countenance, suggestive of asceticism. Self-repression, his burdens, and bodily ills made him seem severer than he was; but he could forget these things, especially in preaching, and

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was often borne out of himself as he dwelt upon the victories and glories of Christ's kingdom. He was often in a cheerful mood and his personality could not have been forbidding, for hosts and hostesses heartily welcomed his visits and children were attracted to him.

Another element of strength in his leadership was his love and sympathy for the men whose lives and interests were so largely in his hands. He was ever one of them. He appreciated their work—they were the fighting force of the church; if they succeeded, the church advanced; if they failed, the church lagged—they must have the first consideration. He made a list early in his episcopal career of all the Methodist preachers on the Continent, and he knew each personally and particularly, and it was his regular habit to pray for them. On occasion he wrote to them to advise, suggest, and encourage, and increased his knowledge of them. He believed he knew them better than anybody else, and doubtless he did. He heard with close attention their reports at Conference, and no session was satisfactory to him in which their experiences and labors were not fully stated. He worked side by side with them; he was not above them but one of them—indeed, in labors more abundant than they all; he asked for himself no more than they had; the itinerant preachers got a salary of sixty-

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four dollars, later eighty dollars, a year and traveling expenses. He was content with the same. When he held a Quarterly Conference in Maryland in 1773, where Robert Strawbridge received eight pounds quarterage and Francis Asbury and John King six pounds each he did not complain, but wrote: "Great love subsisted among us at this meeting and we parted in peace." At every Conference he was anxious that the deficits in their meager pittances should be made up, and would first give from his own slender resources, and then go from house to house with a subscription list. He gave his personal belongings more than once—coat, shirt, watch—in necessitous cases. Likewise the families of preachers, and their widows and orphans became his care, and for years he carried about a mite subscription for the benefit of the suffering ministry, and the day before his death, so feeble he could not move, he asked to have the list passed for gifts.

He had no petty jealousies, no grievances, no dislikes to be avenged; he bore attacks, misrepresentations, and abuse with patience and remembered nothing of them in stationing the preachers. John Wesley flayed him mistakenly for pride and ambition, and Asbury called it "a bitter pill"; but he swallowed it, and it did not make him bitter. Receiving a letter attacking him, as he



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came from his knees, his only remark was, "After reading it I returned to my knees." It is not so much a matter of wonder, therefore, that he was successful in establishing the itinerancy where conditions and personal desires of the preachers were so strong against it. He could say deliberately in a letter to the General Conference of 1792, in reviewing the many verdicts he had passed upon itinerants, "I have never stationed a preacher through enmity, or as a punishment," and could add with the conscientiousness which marked his acts and utterances, "I have acted for the glory of God, the good of the people, and to promote the usefulness of the preachers"—as sound a policy as any dispenser of patronage could possibly devise. This is not to say that the preachers were always pleased—that were impossible—but that, in general, as loyal men, they were content, believing that the bishop had done his best.

He spent a great deal of time and thought upon the appointments, using his own full knowledge, without seeking the opinions of the presiding elders. He thought confusion, rather than clarity of decision, came from too much counsel. He was ready to hear the preacher himself if he had special requests to make; but reached his own conclusions with the most painstaking and conscientious care. This duty often weighed

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upon him, and he felt a sense of relief when the stations were announced. Entries in his *Journal* show how this responsibility weighed upon him. The Conference at Petersburg, Virginia, in 1793, presented, he says, difficulties respecting the stations; but the brethren were willing to go where they were appointed and all was well. This was in the section affected by the O'Kelly division. Later, at another Conference, he wrote it was "with the greatest difficulty I could unbend my mind from the business" of the session, meaning the appointments. At still another he "chose not to preach while my mind was so clogged with business." But most of the Conferences "met in unity and peace, and thus ended," or with "not a frown, sign of sour temper, or unkind word"; or "I am distressed at the uneasiness of our people," who "want to choose their own preachers"; or "Close work and great harmony"; or "Unity, peace, and love." Such expressions abound in his *Journal*.

When the preachers came to know him, his utter honesty, his singular love of the church and the brethren; his self-abnegation, his abounding sympathy and sacrifices, his large knowledge and his confidence in his careful judgments won their hearts.

Another element of strength in his competent leadership was the conviction that it was God's

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work in which he was engaged, God's cause, God's kingdom, and he was simply God's instrument, not his vicegerent, as the Pope thinks himself to be. It was not "*My church*," "*My movement*," "*My victories*," but Christ's church, Christ's movement, and Christ's victories. He did not claim great powers for himself nor great credit, and no more intimate relation to God than it was the privilege of others to enjoy. He knew his own weaknesses and failings, none better, and never assumed the prophet's function of "Thus saith the Lord." God's word was equally open to others, and there was no special revelation to himself to pass down to the church. Men knew, not simply from his sermons, but from his everyday life, that his communion with God was never long interrupted. Too much talk, he said once, and too little prayer made him "barren of soul." He wanted always to know the will of God that he might do it.

Asbury was the hardest, most constant worker of all the itinerants. He never spared himself. He could not be idle, save when illness held him; awake, he could not take an enforced rest, without doing something, with mind, hand, or heart, even if it were only amusing and instructing the children. He read and studied a whole library of books; wrote a thousand letters a year; kept up his *Journals*; prepared *Minutes* of Confer-

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ences and the *Discipline* for publication; was in the saddle more than any man of his time; preached more sermons, held more Conferences and made more appointments, ordained more ministers, conducted more funeral services than any contemporary; visited the cities, towns, hamlets, and settlements more thoroughly than any politician, and with the care of all the churches upon him daily wrought out an effective system of government and discipline. He was always at work never for himself, but ever for the Master. Bishop McKendree wrote of his colleague shortly after he (McKendree) was elected in 1808:

I am favored but little with Father Asbury's company. As soon as Conference is over we part, and go with all speed from one appointment to another by different routes to meet at the next Conference. The old soldier (Asbury) travels sometimes on horseback and part of his time on crutches. He preaches standing, sitting, and on his knees, as the necessity of the case requires. He seems determined to labor more than any of us.

Asbury was a man of affairs, great and little, but multitudinous. A Book Concern, a literature, missions, Sunday schools, distribution of Bibles and tracts; educational institutions and schools for children; camp meetings; church extension—what enterprises thronged the teeming brain of this wonder-working man!

Administrative and executive ability! His mind

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would have been crammed with chaotic confusion, if he had had no genius for systematic planning and working. Asbury's colleague, Doctor Coke, had a high estimate of his character and abilities. He wrote in his *Journal*, published in the (American) *Arminian Magazine*:<sup>1</sup>

I exceedingly reverence Mr. Asbury. He has so much simplicity, like a child; so much wisdom and consideration; so much meekness and love; and under all this, though hardly to be perceived, so much command and authority, that he is exactly qualified for a primitive bishop.

Nicholas Snethen, whose name is imperishably connected with the history of early Methodism, speaks of the "great moral courage" of Asbury and of "the mighty energies of his mind." He was "a star of the first magnitude," with "the directing mind and animating soul necessary to direct and move the whole body" of the ministry. The impulse he gave to experimental and practical religion was one of his greatest achievements.

Ezekiel Cooper, one of his intimate friends, said Asbury gained "a kind of irresistible influence" like a ruler in Israel, in nearly every circle in which he moved. Take him for all in all, "no man in America ever came up to his standard."<sup>2</sup>

No man better knew how to put aside self and

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<sup>1</sup> *Centennial History of American Methodism*, John Atkinson, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

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selfish interests. He never worked for himself, or fortune, or fame. He had no ends of his own to serve. He counted himself the servant of the living God, and sought his direction, approval, and glory, and cared not one whit whether his name was listed with the great. God was always first, supreme, with him, the church second, the preachers and people third. His own ambition, if that be the right word, was to accomplish the utmost possible for God and humanity. His intimate traveling companions bear testimony to the fact that, emptied of worldly ambitions and of self, he was filled with the spirit of devotion to God and humanity.

Withal he had the air of one accustomed to marshal and direct men, of one having authority and knowing how to use it. Being one of a considerable company journeying in a section of the West where Indians on the warpath were likely to be met, with common consent he became the organizer of the little force for self-protection. He gave to each a station and duty and himself patrolled the camp through the night to guard against surprise. It seemed appropriate that he should preside where preachers assembled. He had autocratic powers and exercised them, but with reason and not as a tyrant. Methodism could hardly have succeeded without a leader with authority. It is not said that he



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ruled imperiously; the right of the preachers in discussion and decision of questions belonging to them he did not abridge. But his knowledge, force of will, and character, all so evident, made an impression of competency which few hesitated to recognize and accept. Joshua Marsden, a British preacher, serving in Canada, says the preachers, "all tenacious of liberty and equal rights," readily submitted to Asbury's authority "that grew out of his labors," was "founded on reason, maintained with inflexible integrity, and exercised only for the good of all."<sup>3</sup> His moral force was well-nigh irresistible. In his *Journal* (page 407) will be found this entry: "I have written in the most pointed manner to my dear brethren in Baltimore to establish prayer meetings in every part of the town. It must be done." Doubtless it was done.

About most things with which he had to deal Asbury showed much prudence. He was averse to controversy and would not allow himself to be drawn into it, observing that he was clear it ought to be avoided; "because we have better work to do and because it is too common when debates run high there are wrong words and tempers indulged in on both sides."<sup>4</sup> He had plenty of opportunity to take a hand in disputes,

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<sup>3</sup> *The Heart of Asbury's Journal*, Ezra Squier Tipple, pp. 658-89.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

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but he did not. He showed restraint and discretion in the method he pursued with Strawbridge, O'Kelly, and others. Holding a Quarterly Conference in Strawbridge's section, he opened the question of observing the rule of the first Conference in Philadelphia in 1773, that unordained preachers must not administer the sacraments. Strawbridge refused to comply, or even to administer under "the direction of the Assistant."<sup>5</sup> Asbury did not try to compel obedience, nor did he bring on a controversy. When preachers in Virginia insisted on going further and ordaining men, Asbury tried to persuade them not to depart from Wesley's rules but did not engage them in argument. In the end his steady pressure for discipline and order prevailed. So with O'Kelly; he did not challenge him to defend his threatened secession, nor upbraid him with inconsistency in denying the validity of Asbury's ordaining powers, which he had accepted for himself and had imparted to others. He answered O'Kelly's attacks with a kind, conciliatory letter, called on him when he was sick and sought to persuade him by concessions to remain in the ranks.<sup>6</sup> He did not succeed; but he narrowed the secession, which soon dwindled.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289, 350, 352, 353, 371, 460, 515.

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So too in the matter of the Council, Asbury's pet scheme to make unnecessary frequent meetings of the General Conference of all the preachers, which he feared might enact unwise legislation and interfere with the development of the denomination along safe lines. His purpose was good, but the plan open to objection. He selected the members of the Council himself. The first, in 1789, consisted of eleven members besides Asbury. It was attacked, and Asbury got tired of explaining and defending it in the twenty-four Conferences, and it only met a second time. His authority might have forced this expedient on the church, but it would have caused dissension, if not division, and the bishop abandoned it.

Apprehensive of interference with the prerogatives of the appointing power by the General Conference of 1792, the bishop wrote a letter excusing his absence (Bishop Coke was present), saying it would be better that he have no hand in the making of laws he would have to execute. "I am one," he wrote, "ye are many. . . . I scorn to solicit votes. . . . I am not fond of altercations; we cannot please everybody and sometimes not ourselves."

In the matter of rescinding the obligation undertaken by the General Conference of 1784, in its minute on John Wesley, to "obey his commands," Asbury was blamed, but he showed that he

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had nothing to do with it, and that he "sat mute and modest" when it was rescinded four years later. Wesley had made request by letter that Richard Whatcoat be elected and consecrated to assist Asbury, but the General Conference, not thinking it wise that Wesley in England should make selections for America, accepted Coke's proposition to remain and *assist* Asbury and deemed it unnecessary to have another bishop. In 1792, however, Whatcoat was elected, and Lee, the historian, said, "Never did holy hands rest on holier head." In this delicate matter, as in others, Asbury showed a restraint that was masterly, winning increased respect and confidence in America and the approval of John Wesley himself, who saw that he had been misinformed and hasty in his former criticisms of the American leader. The latter could easily have quarreled with Coke over his officious proposal in 1791 to Bishop White, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, that the two bodies be united. Coke admitted that he had not consulted Asbury in the matter, and that when he did reveal it, Asbury, "with that caution which peculiarly characterizes him, gave no opinion on the subject." A better illustration of the latter's good sense and restraint it would be hard to find. He could have launched a hot and hurtful controversy, but did not.

Bishop Asbury always had a forward look.

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His vision was bent upon the future. He thought about what Methodism was to be, and was deeply concerned that the foundations should be so laid as to provide for permanency and future development. He believed as John Wesley believed that it had a great future. In 1798 he wrote:

I make no doubt the Methodists are and will be a numerous and wealthy people, and their preachers who follow us will not know our struggles but by comparing improved state of the country with what it was in our days as exhibited in my *Journal* and other records of that day.<sup>8</sup>

Ten years later, speaking of the progress of another denomination, he said, "But a despised and dispersed people will possess this land."

And so while he lived and worked and planned in the present, his plans looked toward the future. As we have seen in Chapter XI, there is scarcely an activity, institution, or society of full-orbed Methodism which he did not anticipate. The Book Concern was founded early in his day, and his suggestions for the circulation of needed literature, the Bible and tracts were put into operation. His notion of the literature The Book Concern was ready to furnish, in the last pages of the volume of Minutes of the Conferences, from 1773 to 1794, included Wesley's *Notes*, his *Journal*, his *Life*, and his *Sermons*, Fletcher's *Works*, Baxter's *Saints' Rest*, Asbury's *Journal*,

<sup>8</sup> *The Heart of Asbury's Journal*, Ezra Squier Tipple, p. 441.

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Doddridge's *Sermons to Children*, *Children's Instructions*, Garrettson's *Journal*, a *Hymn Book*, with three hundred hymns, Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation*, and Wesley's abridged *Family Adviser and Primitive Physic*—no mean list of publications for an institution that was only five years old. And out of his beginnings came the Missionary and Church Extension Society, the Boards of Sunday Schools, Education, Conference Claimants, and the like. Not even John Wesley foresaw more clearly the possible lines of future development than Francis Asbury.



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### CHAPTER XIII

#### EARLY METHODISTS AND EDUCATION

THERE are some entries in Asbury's *Journal*, which taken by themselves might be regarded as an indication that he did not appreciate education. Here is one, under date of December 7, 1806:

As to Presbyterian ministers and all ministers of the gospel, I will treat them with great respect, but I shall ask no favors of them. To humble ourselves before those who think themselves so much above Methodist preachers by worldly honors, by learning, and especially by salary, will do them no good.

Asbury was not opposed to learning, else he would not have studied so hard to acquire Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, to acquaint himself with theology, history, literature, science, etc. Neither was he opposed to educational institutions, or he would not have taken upon himself the burden of Cokesbury College, at Abingdon, Maryland, nor of Bethel Academy in Kentucky, and academies in Virginia, Georgia, and elsewhere. It is true he said he never wanted a *college* at Cokesbury, but a *school*, which was not to pronounce against colleges where they could be obtained, but to

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prefer that the Abingdon enterprise should be called what it actually was—a school; a high school in grade, which taught the languages to some extent, and was intended to train men for the ministry. Asbury never had any feeling against institutions like Yale and Princeton; but he knew that Methodism was not in a position, either in numbers, wealth or trained scholarship, to found and build up a college.

The observations he permitted himself to make occasionally, like that quoted above, were provoked by the attitude of some of the college-bred ministers of other denominations who looked down as from a superior height of scholarship upon many Methodist preachers, also upon a number of Baptist preachers, not believing that anyone was fitted for the sacred office who was not a college graduate. This assumed superiority was at times rather galling to the itinerants, many of whom were able preachers and would have graced any pulpit. Some had little education and probably did violence to the King's English, as unpolished speakers. Their strong leader used the best materials he could obtain under the circumstances, making sure that though literary qualifications might not be satisfactory, all were good gospel witnesses. Some one told him there was a special call for "learned" men for the ministry. His gentle response was: "Some

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may think so; but I presume a simple man can speak and write for simple, plain people upon simple truths." This observation appears in his *Journal* immediately after a reference to "a melting, nervous discourse" by Nicholas Snethen, one of his traveling companions. "Hearts," he added, "were strangely moved by the truth," and this he rightly considered evidence of a call of God.

Not all the apostles were learned like Paul. Peter was not. He was a fisherman, and you cannot expect fishermen to be great scholars. But Peter knew how to preach the gospel well enough to make the day of Pentecost, when the divine power descended, an ever-memorable day in the Christian calendar. He was a plain, simple-minded man; but he had a great spiritual experience and knew how to tell it. He was a good witness. And good witnesses were Wesley's itinerants in England and Asbury's itinerants in America. Some when they began their simple ministry had little knowledge of the art of public speech, or of English grammar, or of logic, or of rhetoric, or of theology. They were all laymen in America until the end of 1784. Not one of them was ordained, and they were serving not churches but societies—little companies of believers. There were no churches and no sacraments until the ordained ministry was instituted. But they were men who knew that their sins had been forgiven,

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that salvation by faith and regeneration by the Holy Spirit had come to them, and they had the witness of the Spirit to these things. They were no longer blind men, groping in darkness for the light, for the light had come to them and they could see. And as they preached and prayed, they studied and made themselves familiar with the Bible, and were effective witnesses who, as they grew in grace, grew also in knowledge and ability. The itinerancy was no mean training school, and Francis Asbury was no mean leader and trainer.

Methodists were not the only denomination which made larger use of laymen. The great awakening in which Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and the Tennents were leaders, gave rise to "New Lights," as they were called among the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist churches. The order of preaching in these denominations was described as "a cold intellectualism." Asbury heard some of its representatives and saw evidence of culture, but little spirituality in their utterances. One of the results of the Edwards-Tennent-Whitefield revival was to call attention to this pleasant, but unfruitful style of preaching, and among stirring episodes of the period was a sermon by a Presbyterian divine on "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry,"<sup>1</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Tennent.

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provoked much discussion and was one of the causes of the division of the Presbyterians into factions known as "Old Side," including the Scotch-Irish, and "New Side," taking the New-England view.

Asbury never had this peril to face in the itinerant ranks, for which he was, doubtless, devoutly thankful. The Presbyterian Church had from the first a learned ministry, recruiting from the Scotch universities, then from the New England colleges, and finally and most of all from Princeton, stiffly Calvinistic, but feeling the influence of the great awakening. It was an eminently respectable church, ministry and membership being imbued with high ideas and strong convictions on moral and political as well as on doctrinal and ecclesiastical subjects. They had great men in the pulpit, in the State, and in society, and they were firm as a rock in fidelity to their settled opinions. The church never wanted to be popular and did not court the masses. It saw the Methodist and Baptist denominations growing much more rapidly than itself, without feeling disturbed by the charge that it was unprogressive. Holding that the best use of intelligent and spiritual laymen was to make elders and deacons of them, it was compelled to witness, over its strenuous protests, a large body of Presbyterian members and ministers in the Cumberland



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Valley letting down the bars to an uneducated ministry and organizing a new branch, with no iron-clad rules barring the ministry to spiritual but uneducated men, and with a theology not rigidly Calvinistic but a compromise between Calvinism and Arminianism. A hundred years later they welcomed back a considerable proportion of the wanderers to a larger and less exclusive fold.<sup>2</sup>

What would have been the condition of American Christianity, if John and Charles Wesley, and Thomas Coke, of Oxford University, and Francis Asbury, of the itinerant training school, had insisted on college men only for the ministry? It is not necessary to search for an answer. The Baptists would have gained twice as fast and Methodists would have been select, but few in number. The prophetic vision of Asbury saw unconverted multitudes thronging the cities and towns and hurrying along the highways to populate the wilderness. Like the Master, he saw great fields white to the harvest, but few harvesters, and he prayed earnestly and continuously the Lord of the harvest to send forth reapers into the fields to gather the grain. Obvi-

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<sup>2</sup> Cumberland Presbyterian, the outcome of a revival in Tennessee, Kentucky, and other states. It adopted a confession which softened the decrees of the Westminster Confession, declaring the sovereignty of God, but also the free agency of man. Part of the Church was reunited with the main body in 1910, a century after its organization.



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ously to reach the unconverted was the first and most pressing duty. It could not be postponed until ministers were educated; it could not be put off until a church was organized, with a ministry and the sacraments; it could not wait for the formation of an adequate ecclesiastical system. It was the King's business and it required haste.

Congregationalism had been in America since the landing of the Pilgrims. It had an educated and able ministry; it had two strong colleges to educate recruits; it had well-organized churches, and it had made rough and rocky New England an intellectual, religious, and prosperous section. Bacon says:

The State-Church and the Church-State did not cease to be until they had accomplished that for New England which has never been accomplished elsewhere in America—the dividing of the settled regions into definite parishes, each with its church and its learned minister.<sup>3</sup>

Their idea of a threefold ministry—pastor, teacher, ruling elder—had failed, says the same author, but their dream of a Christian state in the New World, wherein dwelleth righteousness, had been nobly realized. New England Puritanism had some hard and unloving traits, but its rock

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<sup>3</sup> *History of American Christianity*, Leonard Woolsey Bacon, pp. 129-130.

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foundations were covered with the beautiful blooms and fruitage of noble Christian character.

The Protestant Episcopal Church inherited the self-consciousness of the mother church of England, of apostolic descent, apostolic episcopacy and ministry, an incomparable ritual, and the perfection of regularity, to all of which it must hold fast at all risks. It did not recognize any good in Wesley's work that was not more than counterbalanced by its irregularities. Too late came the feeling that it might have taken the infant to its own capacious bosom, and too late the Anglican Church recognized the great leader in Westminster Abbey, the national mausoleum. In America the Episcopal Church was left prostrate by the Revolution, which forced many rectors to return to England, and could not help itself until the mother church gave it the apostolic episcopacy (after the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church). It has grown in power and influence, but it was not ready to seek the unconverted multitude when Methodism bent to the task, though some of its clergy were sympathetic and helpful.

The Baptists seemed to human foresight to have little chance of becoming very numerous. They held principles that everywhere challenged opposition. Their doctrines respecting baptism—that the only scriptural mode is immersion, that

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only those who make confession of faith are the proper subjects of it, that the Lord's table is for immersed believers only, that the baptism of infants has no scriptural warrant—all ran counter to the faith and practice of other denominations. In addition they fought the battle for religious liberty as against churches enjoying state support, and were in consequence persecuted in New England, excepting Rhode Island, where Roger Williams had secured liberty of conscience, though he opposed Quakerism strenuously, in Virginia and elsewhere. But they were ready defenders of their peculiar views, and seemed to thrive on opposition and controversy. Their constant appeal to the Bible, the law and the testimony won them solid support.

They had some educated ministers (President Dunster, of Harvard College, was an early convert, like Roger Williams, and later Charles Chauncy, another Harvard president), but their sources of supply were not equal to the demand created by their rapid growth, and they did not refuse to ordain men who had not been to college. In 1812 the Baptists, not including the companies which were Arminian in doctrine, had become a body with nearly 173,000 members, more than double the number of ten years before, with those, of Virginia, where persecution had been sharpest, in the lead numerically, Kentucky,

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New York, and Georgia coming next in order. It is a curious and interesting fact that the Methodists numbered in 1810 nearly 175,000. They were running nearly neck and neck with the Baptists, probably being a few thousand ahead in 1812. One fifth of the Methodists of 1812 were Negroes. The Baptists have had for years the largest constituency of colored people of any denomination in the United States, the Methodists standing second.

The first decade of the century was a period of widespread revivals, which indicated a popular movement, and involved the problem of a sufficient ministerial supply. The mass of Baptists "were indifferent or hostile to ministerial education, and circumstances were such that a high standard of literary and theological preparation for the ministry would in any case have been unattainable.<sup>4</sup> Those converted under the ministry of "New Light" men, caught the enthusiasm of their "emotional preaching," and seeing that they won more souls than the educated preachers, they deemed education not only unnecessary but harmful. Coupled with this opinion was a strong prejudice among Baptists against ministerial salaries. Not a few of their ministers lived on farms which yielded a fair support. These had oppor-

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<sup>4</sup> *History of Baptist Churches in the United States*, Albert Henry Newman, pp. 380-381.

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tunity for study and improved it. But many never studied and never became instructive preachers. "Noisy declamation in unnatural tones accompanied by violent physical exercises, and manifest emotional excitement, in too many cases took the place of intelligent exposition of the truth made vital by the indwelling power of the Spirit."<sup>5</sup> The result was that the cities were neglected, educated men preferring country pastorates because they could be more independent on their own farms. The Baptist increase was least in New England and greatest in the South and on the border, where the denomination holds the lead to-day of all Protestant bodies, the white and colored Conventions constituting three fourths of the three large Baptist bodies in America.

Philadelphia and New England were the chief centers for the ministry having college training. Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island, was one of the earliest Baptist institutions, and colleges were planned elsewhere, not so much for the preparation of ministers, however, as for general education of Baptists. Differences on this and other subjects provoked much discussion, and gave rise in the first half of the nineteenth century to various divisions, the chief one arising from strenuous opposition to Sunday schools,

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<sup>5</sup> *History of Baptist Churches in the United States*, Albert Henry Newman, p. 382.



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benevolent societies—missionary, Bible, educational, and the like; but the Primitive, or Anti-Mission Baptists are not now a large body, and are gradually declining.

The cause of education achieved a signal triumph long since among the Baptists, who have a long list of universities, colleges, and theological seminaries, and also among other smaller denominations, which for many years resisted colleges and even academies as likely to pervert the faith,<sup>6</sup> but finally succumbed to the spirit of the times.

Francis Asbury wanted educational facilities for the Methodists, establishing, as we have seen, good schools in Maryland, Georgia, Kentucky, Virginia, and elsewhere. But he also proposed primary schools, issuing a beautifully worded address to “the Brethren of the United Societies of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” printed in the Conference *Minutes* of 1791, suggesting that schools be provided as generally as possible, separately for boys and girls of their own families, and for the poor of the neighborhood. He says he is happy to see “so many thousands of the

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<sup>6</sup> The Dunkards, trine immersionists, and strict in nonconformity to the world, who came to America from Germany early in the eighteenth century, were long bitterly opposed to educational institutions, taking at their General Conference unfavorable action nearly fifty years ago on an inquiry as to whether a high school was not permissible. No, it said, and quoted, “Be not high-minded, but condescend to men of low estate,” as scriptural authority.



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present generation happy subjects of knowledge and grace,” and now very greatly desired that “the key of knowledge” may be given to the children of the rising generation. This worthy purpose was not to be achieved, at least in the way the bishop proposed, but it showed the bent of his mind that Methodists should be intelligent.

It is not to be inferred that Methodism appealed only to the poor, ignorant, and wicked classes. Asbury speaks with delight in his *Journal*, November 6, 1772, of what he saw in Maryland:

Men who feared neither God nor regarded man—swearers, liars, cock-fighters, card-players, horse-racers, drunkards, etc.—are now so changed as to become new men, and they are filled with the praises of God. This is the Lord’s work and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Every revival brought notorious characters to repentance, and this is always marvelous. But there was only one prodigal in the family described by the Saviour’s parable. And when he repented and returned it was a great event worthy of a unique celebration, while the older brother, faithful to the family, complained that he was overlooked. But this seems to be the order of the Kingdom. Christ said: “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.” There was also the larger class of the poor and respectable, and to these Methodism

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also appealed, and a smaller class of the educated, and to these also Methodism appealed from the first. Asbury was very welcome to the houses of men like Judge Thomas White, United States Senator Bassett, and Judge Barratt, of Delaware, of the Livingstone family in New York, of Governor Tiffin, of Ohio, and other eminent men, and these with other people of wealth, character, and standing were members of Methodist societies.

It was a thing for rejoicing that Methodism had the poor with it from the beginning, and it will be a matter of profound regret if the time should ever come when this is no longer true. Moreover, it is from this most numerous class that statesmen, leaders in industry, commerce, in the professions, including the ministry, in wealth and influence are recruited, and a true Church of Christ will always be an inspiration and a help in such development. It is to those of large means and spiritual attainments that Methodism owes the development of her great educational institutions at home and abroad.

In one of the early Conferences of the Wesleyan Church of England may be found this striking and urgent injunction to the preachers: "Preach on education. 'But I have no gift for this.' Gift or no gift, you are to do it, else you are not to be called a Methodist preacher."

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It is extremely unlikely that Francis Asbury was unaware of this imperious call to duty. It is certain that he obeyed it. He preached at the inauguration of Cokesbury College and subsequently, and at the opening of other similar institutions and on other occasions. It is more than probable that he addressed Conferences on the subject, and that in his charges to candidates for ordination he impressed upon their receptive minds the necessity of urging education upon church members. The Methodist Episcopal Church has had a Board of Education since 1869, and there are 58 colleges and universities at home and abroad, 156 secondary schools, 66 theological and training schools, with 173,000 students in all. This great outcome of the efforts of the larger branch of American Methodism is not the result of a revolution in the policy of education after the death of Asbury, but of an evolution from the beginning.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### INFLUENCE OF METHODISM ON THE NATIONAL LIFE<sup>1</sup>

**A**SBURY'S thought was that he would stay about ten years in America and then go back to England. He was an Englishman and loved his own country; but the web of circumstances of providential ordering so entangled him that, though he saw missionary after missionary leaving the colonies at the outbreak of the war and yearned for his old home and the homeland, he felt that he must remain. His heart was knit to the struggling Methodist societies. He was not yet ready to forswear allegiance to his own country, nor to admit that the Declaration of Independence was justified. English ministers of the Episcopal Church, to which he looked for the sacraments, had left their flocks, and in the sifting process which followed all men remaining were pressed to enter the colonial army or to take the oath of adherence to the American cause. The young itinerant could not go on openly with his work without risking arrest and imprisonment, particularly in

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<sup>1</sup> Published in the Methodist Review of September-October, 1923.

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Maryland, so he went into retirement in Delaware, under the protection of his friend, Thomas White, whose house he always called his home. He corrects the statement of Lee's *History* that his seclusion for about two years was a period of inactivity and says, "On the contrary, except about two months of retirement from the direst necessity, it was the most active, the most useful, and the most afflictive part of my life."<sup>1</sup> He adds that he stole through the woods, or after dark, for house-to-house visitation, and that during the period (1778-79) there was an increase of 1,800 members.

The Methodists suffered from Wesley's early declaration against the cause of the colonies and from their relation to the Episcopal Church, and many of them were classed as Tories, a name that was bitter in the mouth of Americans. Some of the preachers were arrested, beaten, and imprisoned and Asbury's host and convert, Judge White, was in jail for a time; but Asbury escaped this indignity. He was very prudent in his expressions and strove to avoid offense. When and where he became an American citizen he does not state, probably near the close of his hiding. Bishop DuBose says he was "made a full citizen in Delaware,"<sup>2</sup> 1780, and was free to go even

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<sup>1</sup> *The Heart of Asbury's Journal*, Ezra Squier Tipple, p. 625.

<sup>2</sup> *Francis Asbury*, Bishop H. M. DuBose, pp. 96-99.

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into Maryland, bearing a letter from the governor vouching for him.

Bishops Asbury and Coke had at least two conferences with George Washington, the first at Mount Vernon, in 1785, when they sought his signature to a petition for emancipation of the slaves in Virginia.<sup>3</sup> The second was in New York, in 1789, the same year he became President. The conference there, at the suggestion of Asbury, named the two bishops to bear the greetings of Methodism to the new President. Asbury read the short address, which he had probably drafted, conveying to the distinguished soldier and patriot the congratulations of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and expressing "as full confidence in your wisdom and integrity for the preservation of those civil and religious liberties which have been transmitted to us by the providence of God and the glorious Revolution, as we believe ought to be reposed in man." Asbury could hardly have used the two words "glorious Revolution" if he had not fully accepted the new country as his own.

The moral conditions in the United States in the last half of the century of the Edwardean-Whitefield revival, 1735-45, and the rise of Methodism were very bad, reflecting the low state of social, political, and business life in England. The Wesleyan revival began there at

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter XV, "Divisions of Methodism," p. 211



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a time when religion, as represented by the Established Church and the dissenting bodies, was at a low ebb and the lives of many of the ministers were far from regular. The English court was profligate, bribery in elections, political corruption, drunkenness, and licentiousness were widespread, and little regard was given to the laws for the prevention of public disorder and crime. In the colonies the influence of the churches had declined, and intemperance and social vices, as in the mother country, had greatly increased. Even in Puritan New England social life had become degenerate. Ministers drank wine and rum freely, particularly at funerals, the towns furnishing wine and rum or cider for these occasions. So notorious had this practice become that to prevent scandal the General Court of Massachusetts in 1742 forbade the use of intoxicants at such services. The Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in Londonderry, New Hampshire, held celebrations in which drinking, horse-racing, and other wild features characterized their fun-making. Licentiousness was widespread in all the colonies, and the history of the times speaks of the vices and irregularities of the ministers. French infidelity came to weaken attachment to religion, and the demoralizing influences attending the French-Indian and Revolutionary wars tended to increase tolerance of and familiarity with crime.

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Church warnings issued near the end of the century speak of the spread of "gross immoralities," "degeneracy of manners," "prevalence of vice," "desecration of the Sabbath," "profanity," "neglect of the sanctuary," "disrespect" for the teachings of the Bible, disregard of marriage vows, low political ideals, "departures from the faith," "impiety," "neglect" of the church sacraments, and "every species of debauchery and loose indulgence." In politics there was gross abuse of President Washington, coupled with praise of Aaron Burr. Of course conditions were worse in the new settlements in the wilderness beyond the Alleghanies, before the civil law was fully established and firmly administered, and where religion had not been able promptly to build churches and inaugurate regular services. Cleveland was for some time, we are told, without a sanctuary and the people hardly knew any difference between Sunday and other days. In many cases life sank to shocking depths. To the destitute sections of Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee Bishop Asbury made many toilsome journeys, holding services, establishing class meetings, distributing Bibles and other literature, and furnishing preachers, as rapidly as possible, to ride long circuits and to supply deterrent influences to bolster the inability of the civil administration. Christian teaching and the example of Christian

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families redeemed such elements from barbarity. They were poor, they lived in primitive style, they were inured to privation, but they were saved by the church, and no man did more among Methodists than Francis Asbury. If Methodists did more than other churches, it was because their system of itinerancy and circuits of many appointments made it possible for them to cover more ground with gospel influences.

Bishop Asbury was always a staunch friend of law and order, not only in church but also in State. Maintenance of the law of the land was of no less concern to him than strict observance of the law of God, which embraces good morals. As he went constantly from city to city, town to town and settlement to settlement, calling men and women to repentance, he was an influential advocate of loyalty to civil government, and of the highest duty and privilege of a patriot. That man is the best patriot who is the best citizen, and the best citizen is he who breaks neither the laws of God nor the laws of man. What he did the itinerants as a body also did; they were always friends of the government and upheld the supremacy of law. Their appeals to the vicious, disorderly class were particularly successful. The converts ceased to do evil and learned to do good, becoming valuable citizens where they had been scourges of society. A well-wisher

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once said to the bishop that it was unfortunate that so many drunken, disorderly and vicious persons were attracted by Methodism, intimating that they lowered its social status. But the quick reply was that it is the glory of the gospel that it reaches and lifts the lowest and most unworthy, for Christ came expressly to call sinners to repentance.

The value of religion as a reformatory power cannot be overestimated. Wickedness and vice not only vitiate character but reduce the industrial, productive, and provident power of the individual. America had more than usual of this undesirable class when peace was declared, for war has a disastrous effect upon morals. Asbury rejoiced to find on his first visit to Maryland so many converts from among the wicked and lawless and recognized it as the Lord's work. From the beginning Methodism not only required its ministers to be total abstainers from intoxicating drinks, when abstinence was the exception and not the rule, but also forbade them to hold slaves. Its members were exhorted to keep themselves free from complicity in the manufacture and sale of alcoholic liquors, as well as from the use of them as a beverage. Moreover, the *Discipline* enjoined ministers and members alike not to contract debts where there was no prospect that they could be paid, and lapses from

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honesty in dealings with one another were punishable by expulsion, if not made right. Such contributions to the sobriety and sound morals of society were of distinct value to the State, since an immoral electorate must endanger the soundness and perpetuity of the State.

The lawless class was particularly large in the wilderness into which settlers began to stream at the end of the Indian war—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Asbury found families as ignorant and uncivilized almost as the Indians. The preachers did not neglect this class and led the parents to seek better things for themselves and their children, winning many from a kind of barbarism to decent and orderly life. Without the influence of the churches these new States would have lagged in the march of civilization.

Not only were good morals and law and order required of converts, and cultivated among members by the efficient system of supervision of their conduct in the weekly class meeting, but increase of intelligence was inculcated. Every family should have a Bible and read and study it, and to the Bible were added the hymn book, the *Discipline*, and much uplifting literature. The children must learn to read and write, and so education became the settled policy of the church, and the bishop frequently preached edu-



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cational sermons and he, assisted by Bishop Coke, founded and supported Cokesbury College at Abingdon, Maryland, and he also established a number of academies or institutes in other States and planned for a series of primary schools to educate the children, especially of the poor. Then, too, in 1786, he began to establish Sunday schools for the training of children in the fundamentals and in Bible knowledge.

Moreover, in the days when the daily and weekly press was in its infancy and its circulation confined largely to the cities and towns, and intercommunication by letter was slow and costly, it is difficult to measure the value of the periodical visitation by an intelligent, observant citizen like Asbury to the homes of the rich and poor alike in all parts of the expanding republic. In the conversations held around the family table how natural it was that questions should be asked of the guest: "What news do you bring from Washington?" "What do you think of President Jefferson's plan of the Louisiana Purchase?" "Will it cost too much for our new nation to pay?" "Do we need any more territory?" "And what does he mean by sending the Merriwether-Clark expedition to the Pacific Coast—more territory?" "Is it true that General Jackson after driving the British troops out of Pensacola has gone suddenly to New Orleans?"



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“Is Nicholas Snethen still chaplain of Congress?”  
“Is that the proper work of a preacher?” And the replies would be backed with reasons and would be convincing and illuminating. Attacks on the President and other statesmen were unrestrained and virulent in those days, and a visitor who could speak with confidence, and who could cast light on certain policies of Congress would be welcome. Much that would be helpful could also be mentioned, at least as illustrations, in sermons, and so the bishop on continuous journeys and the preachers on extended circuits could greatly add to the stock of useful information of their hosts.

The questions involved in government acts, as President Adams’ “midnight judges,” Jefferson’s partisan appointments and demoralization of the public service, had a moral bearing, and visiting ministers would be sure to discern between the right and wrong side, whatever might be their own party predilections. The church has its ideals which men of affairs may consider impractical, still the ideals of to-day may guide to actual accomplishments in the future.

In any event, it was a great thing for the developing republic to have a distinguished man, known through the length and breadth of the land, to set forth daily in sermon and lecture and conversation in every part of its domain the

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principles of right thinking and right doing. Also to increase the number of the righteous is a great service, for they make the most valuable citizens. Perhaps no man was better and more widely known than Francis Asbury. People talked about him, were curious to see and hear him and thought of him as a hero, a wonderful man. He mentions preaching in Washington where many came to hear "the man who rambles through the United States." Governors, members of Congress, generals, judges, lawyers, doctors, men of learning, influence and wealth, as well as the common people, knew him and welcomed him to their homes and were glad to talk with him and hear him preach. United States Senator Bassett, of Delaware, shy at first of the severe-looking itinerant in black, became his fast friend. We have lived and labored so long, Asbury writes, that we are "a spectacle to men, and though we say but little the people want to see us."

He neglected no class of society. The preachers are instructed, he writes, to hold service among the soldiers and he himself did so at every opportunity. In his last years, amid his increasing infirmities, he mentions preaching to the Union volunteers by request. He visited prisons and talked and prayed with the condemned. At one service the soldiers were talking and dancing about the door, but the next night they were

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quiet and subdued. In Ohio, in 1810, Colonel Putnam, son of the general of Revolutionary fame, invited him to the house of Waldo, grandson of the old chief, and there he spent a very interesting evening with several Revolutionary officers, who had moved there from Massachusetts. In Georgetown, Delaware, he spoke in the courthouse to judges and counselors. Governor Bassett and wife rode forty miles to meet him, in his advanced years, at Barratt's Chapel, and Dr. Edward White, son of Thomas White, insisted on entertaining him, on the occasion, saying his parents thought more of him than of "any man on earth," showing that he made fast friends among the distinguished as among the common people and had a wide and strong influence.

Theodore Roosevelt, in an address when he was President of the United States, at the American University, Washington, spoke of Methodism as "indissolubly interwoven with the history of our country." He continued:

It entered on its period of rapid growth just about the time of Washington's first presidency. Its essential democracy, its fiery and restless energy of spirit, and the wide play it gave to individual initiative, all tended to make it peculiarly congenial to a hardy and virile folk, democratic to the core, prizing individual independence above all earthly possessions and engaged in the rough and stern work of conquering a continent. . . . The whole country is under

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a debt of gratitude to the Methodist circuit riders, the Methodist pioneer preachers, whose movement westward kept pace with the movement of the frontier, who shared all the hardships in the life of the frontiersman, while at the same time ministering to that frontiersman's spiritual needs and seeing that his pressing material cares and the hard and grinding poverty of his life did not wholly extinguish the divine fire within his soul.

President Harding recognizes the need in the world of "the restoration of the soul of religious devotion and 'individual consecration'" to the religious ideal which finds it "able to give something that neither patriotism nor civic virtue can ever afford." These tributes of men eminent in the national life show that Christianity is fundamental to the life of the republic.

It is said by historians that England in the eighteenth century sank to a lower condition in morals and political life than it had reached since the Protestant Reformation was established and that the Puritan standards which Cromwell had set up were lowered by the influence of the governments of Charles II and the two Georges, in reaction against what was called the "sour-faced hypocrisies," the antagonism to Christmas merry-making, and to innocent enjoyments of the Cromwell epoch. This reaction well-nigh submerged the Christian religion, so extreme was it for a century or so. The inference is that

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government reflects more or less popular conditions. Out of the Wesleyan revival came the Victorian regime, the purest and best England had known, and it also was England's best defense against the excesses of the French Revolution and the end-of-the-century outbreak of infidelity in France and Germany.

It follows that when the church is at its best, when its spiritual life is purest, and its example most consistent with its profession, its influence on people and rulers is greatest and most salutary. And under no form of government is this influence so great and direct as in a republic like our own. An illustration thrusts itself directly on our attention in the anti-slavery issue. Secession of the South followed close on the heels of church agitation of the wrongfulness of holding human beings as slaves, and the growing demand for emancipation. In the days before the moral aspect of slavery had awakened the church the buying and selling of men was simply a commercial transaction in which New York and New England could participate without a disturbed conscience. Where slavery was established and was profitable, as in the South, it continued under a quiescent or acquiescent conscience, because emancipation seemed to involve an enormous loss in the overturn of economic conditions. The division of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as

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well as of other churches, was inevitable when the aroused conscience of the Northern section was met by the determined opposition of the Southern section. Statesmen like Henry Clay shuddered with fear of what this division portended in the near future—division of States and terrible civil war.

If the conscience of the church in the non-slave-holding States had not been quickened by evidences of the evils of slavery and of its threatened invasion of free States, and by the revolting aspects of the pursuit of fugitive slaves in free territory, the civil convulsion would, of course, have been delayed for a season, but only for a season. It was inevitable.

The church, by common consent, is the institution whose business it is to stir, to quicken, to instruct, to buttress the conscience of the people. It is always, therefore, wherever it is alive, the moral leader of the nation. John the Baptist instructed the awakened publicans to exact no more than was due, and the anxious soldiers to do no violence and be content with their hire, and wicked Herod that it was not right for him to take his brother's wife. Christ set forth ideals which not even his church, after the lapse of twenty centuries, has fully met. Martin Luther braved Pope and king in setting forth the moral wrongs in the sale of indulgences and became a



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more powerful leader than the Pope himself. John Wesley's spiritual ideals carried with them great moral principles, and aroused a nation. Francis Asbury bore personal testimony against the evils of slavery, the making, buying, selling, and use of intoxicants, and preached the doctrine that salvation by faith required repentance for and abandonment of all known sin, and also that sanctification, or perfection in love, is possible and desirable in the present life, an experience which he was sure he possessed. He proclaimed all these things and urged them upon the preachers as their personal privilege to possess and their duty to preach.

It was not strange, therefore, that Asbury and his host, with other Christian churches, bore testimony against slavery, against drunkenness and that which creates it; against war as a curse, against violation of the sanctity of marriage and of the family; against duelling, the lottery, gambling, fighting, and other evils; and most of these things which were tolerated by public sentiment in those times are under the ban of the law, government following at somewhat long range the leading of the church.

There can be no question as to the value of the contribution to national integrity, perpetuity, and prosperity of those who by precept and example stand for justice, right thinking, right

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doing, right living. If monuments are appropriate for generals and admirals and great fighters who bring back peace, why not much more appropriate for leaders like Francis Asbury, who labor to make peace permanent by inculcating the principles of justice and righteousness—principles which never yet created a war?

CHAPTER XV

DIVISIONS OF METHODISM

**I**T seems inevitable that division should come in the Church of Christ. From the apostolic period to the present no one has been able at any time to say the church is one and indivisible. Human nature, even when sanctified, contains the seeds of division. There were no greater or better apostles than Peter and Paul, and yet they could differ strenuously; and Paul and Barnabas had a sharp contention over Mark and refused longer to travel together, Barnabas taking Mark as his companion, leaving Silas to Paul. We have "this treasure in earthen vessels," and cannot expect that the perfection of the treasure will extend to its container. Long before the division of the Christian Church into the Eastern and Western, or Greek and Latin branches, the Arminian, the Saint Thomas, and other bodies had appeared; and before the great separation from the Roman Catholic Church led by Luther there were various small bodies which refused to fellowship the corruptions of the Church of Rome. John Milton spoke of "the subdichotomies of your petty schisms," and these have

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been illustrated in the history of Christianity. Francis Asbury's idea of schism was that it is "not dividing hypocrites from hypocrites, formal professors from people of their own caste," nor "nominal Methodists from nominal Methodists"; but "schism is dividing real Christians from each other and breaking the unity of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup> This is reasonable, otherwise it would be difficult to exercise discipline in expulsion of members, which that apostle himself exercised, without incurring the blame of schism. The right of separation must always be recognized where conscience is oppressed, liberty denied, or truth suppressed.

There was no permanent division in American Methodism in Asbury's day. The withdrawal of James O'Kelly and others threatened serious results for a while, but in ten years several secessions from the secession occurred and, according to Jesse Lee, "it was hard to find two of one opinion." O'Kelly protested against the power given to the episcopacy and virtually disagreed with himself, for he declaimed against Asbury's right to ordain, though he had accepted ordination at his hands for himself and had unhesitatingly ordained others. Every concession possible was made to him in vain. He withdrew and organized his followers as Republican Methodists, and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Heart of Asbury's Journal*, Ezra Squier Tipple, p. 414.

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these subsequently united with Presbyterians and Baptists in the formation of the Christian Connection or Church.

Methodism exists now in fifteen divisions, not taking account of those which have been absorbed or have died out, nor of those which have not retained the word "Methodist" in their title. Of the fifteen divisions four white and three colored have come from the Methodist Episcopal Church; two white and two colored from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, one colored each from the African Methodist Episcopal and the Methodist Protestant Church, and one white from the Primitive Methodist Church of England. Two other inconsiderable colored bodies, the African American Methodist Episcopal and the Colored Methodist Protestant, not included in the above list, sprang, the former from several branches, the latter from the Methodist Protestant Church.

In addition to these fifteen divisions are six Pentecostal bodies which have not retained the word "Methodist" in their titles, but owe their existence to withdrawals from the Methodist Episcopal Church—the first two and the sixth in the following list—the third from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the fourth and fifth from the Free Methodist Church. 1. The Church of the Nazarene, with about 47,000

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members. 2. The International Apostolic Holiness Church, with more than 12,000 members. 3. The Pentecostal Holiness Church, with over 5,000 members. 4. The Holiness Church, with less than a thousand members. 5. The Pentecost Bands of the World, with 218 members. 6. The Pillar of Fire, whose 1,200 members wear blue uniforms. These withdrawals were due to the feeling that not sufficient emphasis was given to Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification in the churches from which they took place. This doctrine is made prominent in these Holiness bodies, which accept the Methodist system in general, the General Rules and Methodist usages, emphasizing nonconformity to the world. They are premillenarian, and three teach faith healing. All these bodies accept the Methodist principle of superintendency.

There are three or four other bodies which are Methodistic in doctrine, discipline, and usage, and are recognized as eligible to a place in the Ecumenical Methodist Conference:

1. The United Brethren in Christ (two bodies), the founder of which was the bosom friend of Bishop Asbury, Philip William Otterbein, of the Reformed German Church. These bodies accept Methodist doctrines and discipline, and are episcopal. The organization took place in 1800. If Bishop Asbury and other Methodists had been



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willing to recognize German-speaking churches, there probably would have been a union of the two. The division in the United Brethren itself was due chiefly to the question of oath-bound secret societies. The smaller body still refuses to accept as members persons connected with such societies. The two bodies have a total of nearly 380,000 members.

2. The Evangelical Association was the outcome of the extension of the Methodist evangelistic movement to German-speaking people in Pennsylvania and Maryland. Jacob Albright, born in Pennsylvania in 1759, was a Lutheran who came under the influence of an evangelistic minister of the Reformed German Church, was converted and became a Methodist. Methodist leaders, believing that the German language would not long survive in the United States, refused for a time to organize churches for its use. Accordingly Albright, who became a preacher in 1796, began to preach among his own people and to organize the converts into churches, the outcome of which, of necessity, was a new denomination in 1803, the Evangelical Association, of which he became the first bishop. A denominational division occurred in 1889 creating the United Evangelical Church, but the two bodies were reunited in 1922 as the Evangelical Church, with about 259,000 members, including

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those in Germany, Switzerland, Russia, China, and Japan.

The race question, the source of most of the division of Methodism, early appeared as a troublesome problem. Asbury as an Englishman had a great interest in the Negroes. He had probably never seen any in England and was curious about them. He sympathized with the slaves and frequently speaks in his *Journal* of the "poor Africans," whose "sable faces" appeared so pathetic to him in his congregations in the South. He and Doctor Coke called on George Washington at Mount Vernon and asked him to sign a petition for emancipation of the slaves in Virginia. The first President thought it not expedient to do this, but expressed sympathy with their attitude, and provided in his will for the emancipation of his own slaves. Rules against slavery, in States permitting them to be freed, appeared in the *Minutes* of the Conferences as early as 1780, applying both to itinerants and local preachers, also to members who bought and sold slaves. The General Conference of 1784 adopted provisions "to extirpate the abomination of slavery" which, of course, could not be carried out, nor could emancipation be discussed, even, in some of the States.

Methodism had its message of salvation to Negroes, slave and free, and probably they were

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admitted to membership in the societies almost from the beginning. In 1786 and thereafter they were reported in a separate column. In that year there were about 2,000 of them, most of whom were in Maryland and Virginia, with thirty-three in New York and on Long Island. They grew rapidly in number, constituting in 1796 one fifth of the total membership of 66,608.

At the beginning there were "no Negro pews, nor back seats, nor gallery especially provided for the dark-skinned members." Captain Webb and his associates, seeking for salvation of souls, took no heed of the complexion of their hearers.<sup>2</sup> Bishop Hood says that as the Methodists grew in number "Negro haters" crept in. Not "haters," but people with race prejudice, which often became strong. Some extremists even doubted whether the Negro had a soul, insisting that he sprang from gorillas or orang-outangs. But it must be admitted that in the slave States the Negro had a place in the white churches, even though it might be in galleries, or back of railings separating them from the whites, and was by them saved from barbarism. Bishop Hood, who was a leader of large ability, naturally represents such distinctions, but were they not natural and inevitable? They obtained among all denom-

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<sup>2</sup> *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, Bishop J. W. Hood, p. 1.

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inations. The question whether it would have been better if Negro members had been associated on equal social terms with white members, Bishop Hood does not definitely discuss, but he does claim that Negroes in Negro churches have made much greater advances than Negroes in white churches. If that is so, is the question not one of expediency and not of principle, since the Negro in his own denominations has all the rights that the white man possesses in white churches? Race prejudice, at all events, is deeply rooted and difficult to overcome.

John Wesley was strongly opposed both to the slave traffic and to slavery. England freed herself of complicity with the former in 1806 and then abolished slavery in her colonies a generation later. Slavery existed in the original American colonies, but gradually ceased in the North, because it was unprofitable,<sup>3</sup> and became a settled institution in the South, where climate and the production of sugar, rice, and cotton seemed to make it necessary.<sup>4</sup> Strange to say, George Whitefield used his influence in England to have slavery introduced in Georgia, where he had been on a visit, and it was done in 1751, contrary to the wish of the colonists. The great evangelist died a slave holder himself, leaving

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<sup>3</sup> *History of the United States*, John Clark Ridpath, p. 487.

<sup>4</sup> *Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, Gross Alexander, p. 4.

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seventy-five slaves in that colony on the Orphan House Plantation.

The race question not only resulted in the separation of colored members from the Methodist Episcopal Church (see pages 223-4) but also gave rise to divisions among the white bodies themselves. Indeed, it was a fruitful source of trouble and division in nearly all the denominations. The Mennonite body, taking advanced position against slavery as early as 1688, have been free from any complicity with the evil. It declared that those who steal or rob men and those who buy and sell them are alike culpable. A century later the Quakers, who had been somewhat tolerant, bore strong testimony against the institution and so exercised discipline that slaveholding Friends disappeared before the Revolution. The German body of Dunkards treated colored members exactly the same as white, admitting them to communion, and bestowing upon them the holy kiss. In Methodism most of the early itinerants came from the South where slavery existed. Freeborn Garrettson was one of these, and he said it never occurred to him that the holding of slaves was morally wrong. He had never read anything on the subject for or against until he became a preacher. In the discussions in Conference and in conversation Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke spoke against



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slaveholding and the buying and selling of human beings, as contrary to God's law and the rights and dignity of mankind. Not a few preachers and lay members were moved by these considerations to liberate their slaves. The rules which had been proposed in the Annual Conferences, from 1780 onward, to free the societies from complicity with the evil, could not, of course, be executed in those States which by law prohibited discussion of the subject; and seeing that this was a stubborn fact, the rule was relaxed in 1800, for slaveholders had souls, as well as slaves, and Methodism had a mission to them, Asbury himself making a motion that one thousand copies of the *Discipline* be printed with the paragraph on slaves omitted for use in South Carolina.

In the free States a moral standard against slavery was raised which attracted more and more support as discussion proceeded and abolition became a burning question in the first half of the nineteenth century. It made friends steadily in New England and in northern New York, also in Ohio and elsewhere; but there was a strong sentiment in the North against agitation, on the ground that emancipation, however desirable, could not be forced on sovereign States without violating the federal Constitution and probably disrupting the Union. And so the



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discussion went on in the press, on the forum, and in the churches and anti-slavery societies were organized. The General Conference of 1840 was forced to give much attention to the subject, stating and defending its conservative position as clearly and strongly as possible, particularly to the mother church in England. In the next four years the agitation grew, and the General Conference of 1844 was brought face to face with a situation it could not evade. Bishop Andrew, of Georgia, had indirectly come into the possession of slaves, his wife having brought this kind of property to her husband. A majority of the delegates insisted that he ought to get rid of his slaves, or suspend his episcopal functions meanwhile. Action to this effect was taken by a vote of 111 to 69. The Southern delegates presented a protest, and it being evident that division of the church would take place, a plan of separation was adopted, and under it 455,217 members went out to join the Southern body and 644,229 remained with the Northern. One of the speakers in the Conference predicted that political division would follow ecclesiastical division, which was to be verified sixteen years later.

Both ecclesiastical and political division were inevitable. Lines of separation in other churches followed those dividing the free from the slave States—Presbyterian, Protestant Episcopal, Lu-

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theran, Methodist Protestant—while other bodies like the Roman Catholic, the Baptist, etc., were cut off from intercommunication in the two sections. No other single cause has been productive of more denominational separations. The bitterness engendered by the Civil War added greatly to the difficulty of overcoming the ecclesiastical dissensions and differences. But reunions have taken place between the severed dioceses of the Protestant Episcopal, and the factions of the Methodist Protestant, Lutheran, Baptist, Christian, and other bodies. Fraternity was established in 1876 between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the sentiment for reunion has risen steadily in both bodies.

In order of time as the result of divisions among white Methodists, leaving out of consideration those branches which have died out or been merged, the following constitute the present list of churches, using the official titles:

1. The Methodist Episcopal Church. This body, direct in descent from the organization at Baltimore in 1784, notwithstanding all its losses by withdrawal, expulsion, secession, separation, and division, continues to occupy the first place as to number of Annual Conferences, ministers, churches and members, of Sunday schools, officers and teachers, and scholars; as to value of denom-

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inational property of all kinds, and as to annual budgets of running expenses of its churches and multiplied institutions, and the income of its varied benevolences, including its home and foreign missions.

2. The Methodist Protestant Church. This body was the outcome of an agitation for the introduction of lay representation in the Annual and the General Conferences, for the reduction of the powers of bishops and for elective presiding elders. Objection had been made almost from the first to the absolute stationing power and the appointment of presiding elders by the bishop, and both of these questions had been decided against the proposed innovations. Lay representation was a new proposition. In the advocacy of these reforms, in which feeling ran high, some of the ministers were suspended and expelled and so were many laymen. Some voluntarily withdrew, seeing no probability that the reforms asked for would be granted, and the new denomination was organized in Pittsburgh in 1830. Among the leaders in the movement were Asa Shinn, Nicholas Snethen, a traveling companion of Asbury, and Alexander McCaine. It began its existence with eighty-three ministers and about five thousand members, and in the next four years added heavily to its numbers. In 1858 a division occurred on the slavery ques-

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tion, the new body calling itself The Methodist Church. A dozen years after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery the two bodies were reunited, with a total of 116,542 members.

The Methodist Protestant Church has no bishops nor presiding elders and the president of an Annual Conference continues to serve as pastor. Appointments of preachers are made by a committee, the Conference approving. There is lay representation in the Annual and also in the General Conference. The president of the latter serves as a superintendent for four years. The denomination has two publishing houses, one in Baltimore and one in Pittsburgh, with two weekly organs. It has several colleges and conducts both home and foreign missions.

3. The Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America. There were two questions involved in the organization of this body in 1843—opposition to slavery and to episcopacy. Orange Scott, a strong preacher and a powerful debater, was the leader of the movement, which began with about six thousand members, but never obtained a large following. It has no bishops, but general supervision is given by the president of its quadrennial General Conference. It has a publishing house in Syracuse and a weekly organ. It is opposed to secret oath-bound societies, and observes plainness of dress and holds the Wesleyan

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doctrine of sanctification. There is no time limit to the itinerancy.

4. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South. On the basis of the provisional Plan of Separation, adopted by the General Conference of 1844, delegates of all the Annual Conferences in the South, sixteen in number, organized in 1845 the above-named body, and arranged that its first General Conference should be held in May, 1846. Two bishops, Soule and Andrew, adhered to the new organization, and in 1846 two additional bishops were elected. Arrangements were also made for a publishing house. The obligation of giving the gospel to the slave population was accepted as of binding force. The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1848, declared the Plan of Separation null and void and declined to receive the overture for fraternal relations which the Southern General Conference tendered by its appointed representative, Dr. Lovick Pierce.

Differences between the two sections were increased by the Civil War and were aggravated by the entry of the Methodist Episcopal Church into the South, after the war, to organize Annual Conferences, both among the white and colored people, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, coming into Northern territory in the same way. Happily, the controversial period is at an end,



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and negotiations for reunion are as cordially approved in the South as in the North, the crucial question being as to the plan.

The Southern body, with its high-grade universities and colleges, its home and foreign mission work and its other organized benevolences, has become a great and influential denomination in the South, second only in numbers among white bodies to the Southern Baptist Convention. In doctrine it differs not at all from the Northern body; in polity, it allows its bishops a modified veto power over General Conference legislation which they may regard as unconstitutional. It has no probationary system for members and admits lay representatives both to the General and to the Annual Conference. Women, as in the Northern Church, have equal rights with men in General Conference, Annual Conference, and on all the general boards. Its foreign missions are in Mexico, Cuba, South America, Africa, China, Korea, and Japan.

5. The Primitive Methodist Church in the United States of America. This body was not due to division in America, but in England. Early in the nineteenth century camp meetings were introduced in England, some of the Wesleyans cooperating. Conversions took place and the converts organized in churches, which sought admission to the Wesleyan body. This was



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refused and they were organized in a separate branch. Primitive Methodists who came to the United States formed congregations here. They differ from other Methodist bodies chiefly in having no bishops, no presiding elders, and no time limit. They have Annual and Quarterly Conferences and a quadrennial General Conference. There are three Annual Conferences, and less than nine thousand members.

6. The Congregational Methodist Church. A withdrawal of ministers and members from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in Georgia, growing out of objection to features of the episcopacy and itinerancy, led to the organization of this body in 1852. It has Annual Conferences and a General Conference and is congregational in polity, being like other Methodist bodies in doctrine and usage. It suffered heavy losses in the decade ending in 1916, its churches decreasing from 325 to 197.

7. The Free Methodist Church of North America. An agitation within the bounds of the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church over the alleged departure of the latter from its primitive standard of faith, experience, and practice, and its use of oppressive ecclesiastical machinery, led to withdrawals and expulsions and a separate organization in 1860. The episcopal and most of the other features of the

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parent body are retained. There are forty or more Annual Conferences in the United States and Canada, foreign missions in Africa, India, China, Japan, and the West Indies. A publishing house, which issues a weekly organ, is established in Chicago.

8. The New Congregational Methodist Church. This is the result of withdrawals from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in Georgia, in 1881, due to dissatisfaction with some particulars of administration. It stands for the parity of the ministry, the rights of the local church, opposes assessments, and provides for the ceremony of feet-washing for those who wish it. It is congregational in polity. In doctrine it is in accord with other Methodist bodies. It has but a small following.

The Colored branches, seven in number, are as follows:

9. African Methodist Episcopal Church. Everywhere there was more or less prejudice against the Negroes. In New York they were expected to wait until the whites had communed before coming to the Lord's table. In Philadelphia as early as 1787 they began to take measures for a separate meeting place. Asbury consecrated a new church for them known as Bethel and later ordained Richard Allen, an ex-slave from Virginia, who had furnished most of the money for

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the edifice and who became its pastor and subsequently the first bishop of the church. This is now the largest body of Colored Methodists, with bishops, colleges, missions at home and in Africa and the West Indies, and with a publishing house, in Philadelphia, a weekly church press and a Review.

10. African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. The second largest colored body had its beginning in New York in 1796. Colored members who could not comfortably worship with their white brethren provided themselves with a separate church, which they named Zion. By agreement white pastors conducted their services for twenty years, and then they secured a colored ministry, and completed their separate organization with bishops of their own color. It has a Conference and a bishop in Africa and is equipped in the United States with collegiate and theological schools, and church press.

11. The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. This body, which has its chief strength in the South, was organized by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1870, of its colored ministers and members. In 1845 when the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was organized, it had 124,000 colored members, who had increased to 207,766 in 1860. After the Civil War these members began to leave that body, uniting with

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the Methodist Episcopal Church and with the two leading African churches. This church, with its Board of Bishops, its publishing house, and periodicals, its educational institutions and its missionary operations, has grown rapidly in late years.

12. The Union American Methodist Episcopal Church. This body has a few Annual Conferences in the North, bishops, a General Conference and about twenty thousand members. It dates its beginning from 1813, with the ordination of Peter Spencer, a colored man in Wilmington, Delaware, the actual organization coming some years later. It is an offshoot from the Methodist Episcopal Church.

13. The African Union Methodist Protestant Church. A nonepiscopal body, in general sympathy and agreement with the Methodist Protestant Church, from which it came principally. Each Annual Conference elects its own president for a term of four years. It is a small organization of about twenty-five thousand members.

14. The Reformed Zion Union Apostolic Church. A small body of Colored Methodists dating from 1869, in Virginia, drawn from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. It is episcopal, with Annual Conferences and a General Conference which meets annually. It has less than ten thousand members who are found in Virginia and North Carolina.

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15. The Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal Church. A small body of less than two thousand, with a bishop who was consecrated by a bishop of the Reformed Episcopal Church, resulting in a secession from the African Methodist Episcopal Church, existing in South Carolina and Georgia.

For statistics of all these bodies see appendix.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### ASBURY'S LAST YEAR

**I**T is not given to all men to fill out life to the end with work. Even those who labor for a cause of preeminent importance, like Francis Asbury, are not always permitted either to serve to the last, or to see the results of their activity. It might almost seem that a special Providence granted him his oft-expressed desire to cease to live when he was forced to cease to work. His life was lengthened far beyond his expectation; he faced death, as he supposed, several times before it finally claimed him. Like Paul, he could exclaim when burdens and trials, pains and infirmities crushed his bodily powers, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." It seemed needful to the brethren that he should remain and continue the struggle, with courage ever renewed to equal the task of duty, and so years were added, until God said, "It is enough; come up higher."

He dreaded inaction more than death. And to long periods of inaction fortunately he was not condemned. His longest term of interrupted travel—about two years—was in the Revolution-



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ary War period; but there was much he could do and did do in Delaware, in a quiet way, and he considered this work of pastoral visitation, and of preaching and planning, not inferior to any he did before or after that time. As his episcopal supervision extended over the whole settled portions of the country, he so planned, particularly in his later years, that his winters were spent in the South, where the weather was much milder, and Charleston, South Carolina, was his headquarters, whence he made necessary trips to hold Southern Conferences, and where he attended to accumulated correspondence, preparation of publications for the printer, and the like. In spring, summer and fall he took long journeys across the Alleghanies to the developing West, eastward to New England and northward to western New York and Canada.

His last trip to these Eastern and Western sections was taken in 1815. At the beginning of the year he was in North Carolina working his way to Virginia. His *Journal* states that he was scarcely an hour "free from pain," and that all he did was "in the strength of Jesus." February first he traveled twenty-two miles and "was nearly done." The weather was excessively cold and keenly felt by "an old man of seventy, deeply wounded in the limbs, breast, and lungs." Four days later he preached and was "occupied in

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reading, writing, and patching and propping up the old clay house." A doctor drew from his weakened body "two ounces of blood"—such was medical judgment of the way to bring back strength. Two days later he was facing a driving snowstorm on his northward journey. He met the Conference at Lynchburg, Virginia, preached and ordained and was delighted with the news that a treaty of peace had been made between the United States and Great Britain, and great would have been his joy if he had known that it was to be unbroken for more than a century.

In March he was in Maryland. On his way he saw the ruins of the Capitol and the President's house, which the late enemy had burned, and of the Navy Yard, which Americans had destroyed, and exclaims sadly, "Oh, war, war!" He held the Conference in Baltimore and stationed eighty-five preachers—"no small work." Then to Perry Hall (north of the city), and its abounding comforts. Everybody, he writes, is solicitous for the welfare of the "old man," "a sinner saved by grace." The middle of April he was in Delaware, with old friends anxious to see and talk with him, but even their kindness was a burden in his weakened condition. He preached as he could and traveled when the weather was not too severe and was laid up a week in Philadelphia, after which he preached

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in the beautiful new chapel on Tenth Street. Then on to Trenton and New York, where he arrived the middle of May; thence to Albany to hold Conference and preach by request a funeral sermon on Bishop Coke, "a gentleman, a scholar and a bishop to us, and as a minister of Christ, in zeal, in labors and in services, the greatest man in the last century." He was concerned about stationing the ministers. "Seventy married," he exclaims, "out of ninety-five," with sick wives and children—"how shall we meet the claims of the Conference?" and adds: "We are deficient in dollars and discipline." The ruling passion strong in weakness!

The New England Conference was held in Boston, and the bishop had to call in help in the presidency. In June, on his way back to New York, he came to Ashgrove, where Philip Embury had settled and died, and preached there in the chapel. In New York at the Fourth Street Chapel he spoke on Zephaniah 1. 12, and remarks: "Time was when I could have preached on this text." No doubt; and how he would have roused "the men that are settled on their lees"! He preached also to the Africans, in the church they had built in New York, in love and tenderness, no doubt, for, as already stated, he was greatly interested in the Negro.

In Little York, Pennsylvania, he was engaged

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with "Son" Francis Hollingsworth, in revising his *Journal* down to 1807. He also "tried to preach but wanted strength." Speaking of his *Journal*, he remarks modestly it will be of use as a history of early Methodism, and adds: "I have buried in shades all that will be proper to forget, in which I am personally concerned." But even the buried things speak, as from the grave, of the nobility of his character. July 15, being on his travels again, he enters in his *Journal* the result of his meditations on Colossians 1. 26, 28. He says that Paul, in apostolic power and authority, wrote to a church in which he had not yet preached, to teach and exhort. Why, then, not preach, as well as write, to churches in all parts?

"Oh," say the Baptists, "this is my church." "Oh, this is my congregation," says the stationed minister. And must no other minister preach to these souls? "No," says sectarian prejudice; "No," says bigoted pride; "No," says the wool-shepherd, who is afraid his flock may become too wise for him.

This indicates that the bishop's tale of years had not narrowed, but broadened his idea of Christian fellowship. "Preach," he concludes, "as if you had seen heaven and its celestial inhabitants, and had hovered over the bottomless pit and beheld the tortures and heard the groans of

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the damned." This was the way the fathers roused and reached the careless and hardened.

At the end of July he was in western Pennsylvania on his way to the West, finding the roads there "the roughest on the continent." He had traveled in less than three weeks over three hundred miles. Reaching Zanesville, Ohio, August 6, he preached at a camp meeting on "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." He rejoiced over news of twenty-three converts at Zanesville, forty at Kenhawa, twenty-five at Marietta and twenty-four at Fairfield—all camp meetings. This kind of report always thrilled him.

In most places he visited from house to house, carrying his mite subscription list, by which he helped distressed preachers. He met some who railed at Methodists, and he quietly observes he would not take the best of the railers unless they repent and become converts. He preached a number of times this year from the text, "The night is far spent," and said final good-bys to many, feeling that the time was short. He held the Ohio Conference September 14 and had a conversation with Bishop McKendree at Cincinnati, telling him there ought to be five Conferences in the West, where great things were to be done for the Kingdom—Ohio, Kentucky, Holston, Mississippi, and Missouri. They had a

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delightful communion there and Asbury went on to another Conference at Lebanon and then to the Tennessee Conference. Here he left the duty of stationing the preachers to his colleague, remarking, "My eyes fail. I will resign the stations to Bishop McKendree. I will take away my feet. It is the fifty-fifth year of my ministry and forty-fifth year of labor in America," adding, "My mind enjoys great peace and divine consolation."

This was Bishop Asbury's last Conference. He started on his return journey, preaching on the way as he was able, and arrived at Columbia, South Carolina, December first. On the third he preached and wrote: "I live in God from moment to moment." On the fifth he made his last entry in his *Journal*, stating, "We met a storm and stopped at William Baker's, Granby." How different from his usual way, which was to defy the storm and press on!

His purpose now was to travel by easy stages to Baltimore, where the General Conference was to meet in May. His traveling companion, "Son" John Wesley Bond, whom he greatly loved and who was very careful of him and exceedingly tender, accompanied him in a closed carriage, the bishop preaching on the way as his strength permitted. They reached Richmond, Virginia, March 24, 1816, where he preached his last ser-



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mon on that date. Unable to walk, he was carried into the church and to the pulpit, where, seated on a table, he preached for nearly an hour, with gasping intervals, from Romans 9. 28: "For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness; because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth." Setting out from Richmond they were compelled to stop at George Arnold's, twenty miles short of Fredericksburg, where he passed two days of pain and weakness. Then came Sunday. At eleven o'clock he asked if it was not time for meeting. The family assembled in his room and John Wesley Bond conducted service and spoke on Revelation, chapter 21, beginning, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." Propped up in bed the Bishop followed the service with deep devotion. In the afternoon when speech had failed him and he was asked whether Christ was precious to him, he lifted his hands in assent, bowed his head on his companion's hand, and peacefully breathed out his life, at four o'clock March 31, 1816.

His body was removed from the grave in Arnold's plot, taken to Baltimore, under the direction of the General Conference, in May following, where funeral services were held, members of the General Conference attending, and the body buried in Eutaw Street Church, whence

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it was removed to Mount Olivet Cemetery, where rest the remains of Robert Strawbridge, Jesse Lee, and other faithful Methodists.

Thus ended a life of singular devotion and heroism. For five and forty years with frail body, quivering in pain and weakness, he took his toilsome way back and forth through highway and byway, solitary forest, trackless valley, and lonely mountain trail, from centers of civilization to the vast circumference of wilderness, bearing good news to the weary and hopeless. He never, in all his most troubled experiences, lost heart, or faith, or hope; his message was ever in words of cheer.

No more fitting words have been said of his life and work than those entered in the minutes of the General Conference of 1816:

When we count the thousands throughout this vastly extensive continent who, with affectionate veneration, owned him as their spiritual father, we may question if a weightier charge has been committed to any man since the days of the apostles; and when the records of his life shall meet the public eye, who that patiently examines and candidly decides, will be bold enough to say that since that time duties so great and so various have been by one man more faithfully performed?

We are told that he preached 16,500 sermons, ordained more than 4,000 preachers and traveled on horseback and in carriage 270,000 miles.

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Doctor Buckley pays him this tribute: "So fine was his discrimination that his estimate of men was almost infallible, and such his self-restraint that one could never discern his thoughts before he was disposed to disclose them."<sup>1</sup>

Of the outcome of his faithful labors may it not be said that in the sanctuaries built on the shores of time multitudes have sought and found the way of life, while unseen hands have fashioned glorious mansions in the country eternal for the habitation of a countless concourse of saints. Among these saints this poor, broken, lonely, homeless man, as he was known here, moves a bright and shining soul, greeting his dearest earthly friends in happy endless reunion in the Great Presence, for whose cause he gave himself so absolutely.

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<sup>1</sup> *History of Methodists in the United States*, James M. Buckley, pp. 345-56.

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## APPENDIX

### A CHAPTER OF NUMBERS IN AMERICAN METHODISM.

#### THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

#### I. ANNUALLY FROM 1770 TO 1805 AND BY DECADES SUBSEQUENTLY

<i>Years</i>	<i>Preachers</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Colored Members</i>
1760.....	*1	.....	25	.....
1770.....	*5	.....	250	.....
1771.....	9	.....	*500	.....
1772.....	*9	.....	750	.....
1773.....	10	.....	1,160	.....
1774.....	17	.....	2,073	.....
1775.....	19	.....	3,148	.....
1776.....	24	.....	4,921	.....
1777.....	36	.....	6,958	.....
1778.....	29	.....	6,095	.....
1779.....	32	.....	8,577	.....
1780.....	42	.....	8,504	.....
1781.....	54	.....	10,539	.....
1782.....	59	.....	11,785	.....
1783.....	82	.....	13,740	.....
1784.....	83	.....	14,988	.....
1785.....	104	.....	18,000	.....
1786.....	117	.....	20,681	1,890
1787.....	133	.....	25,842	3,893
1788.....	166	.....	37,354	6,545
1789.....	196	.....	43,262	8,243
1790.....	227	.....	57,631	11,682
1791.....	250	.....	76,153	12,884
1792.....	266	.....	65,980	13,871
1793.....	269	.....	67,643	16,227
1794.....	301	.....	66,603	13,814
1795.....	313	.....	60,291	12,170
1796.....	293	.....	56,664	11,280
1797.....	262	.....	58,683	12,218
1798.....	267	.....	60,169	12,302
1799.....	272	.....	61,351	12,236
1800.....	287	.....	64,894	13,452

\* Estimate.

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<i>Years</i>	<i>Preachers</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Colored Members</i>
1801.....	307	.....	72,874	15,688
1802.....	358	.....	86,734	18,659
1803.....	383	.....	104,070	22,453
1804.....	400	.....	113,134	23,531
1805.....	433	.....	119,945	24,316
1810.....	596	.....	174,560	.....
1815.....	704	.....	211,165	.....
1820.....	904	.....	256,881	.....
1830.....	1,900	.....	476,153	.....
1840.....	2,263	.....	580,098	.....
1844.....	4,621	.....	1,171,356	.....
1845.....	3,483	.....	656,642	.....
1846.....	3,582	.....	644,299	.....
1850.....	4,459	.....	689,682	.....
1860.....	6,987	9,754	994,447	.....
1870.....	9,193	13,373	1,367,134	.....
1880.....	12,096	17,561	1,742,922	.....
1890.....	12,945	22,833	2,283,967	.....
1900.....	12,865	27,230	2,929,674	.....
1910.....	15,049	30,305	3,489,696	.....
1920.....	18,713	29,823	4,393,988	.....
1922.....	18,463	29,420	4,593,540	.....

NOTES.—The statistics of 1760, never given before, are based on the historic fact, abundantly confirmed, of the arrival in New York, August 11, 1760, on the ship *Perry*, from Limerick, Ireland, of Philip Embury and a company of twenty-four others, all of the Established Church but one, and most, if not all, Methodists.

The Methodist Episcopal Church crossed the million line two or three years before it divided in 1845, made up its loss by the separation and crossed the line a second time in the seventh decade, the two-million line in the ninth decade, the three and four-million line in two decades of the present century, and had made half the distance to the five million line in 1922.

In its hundred thirty-eight years of organized existence the Methodist Episcopal Church has multiplied its 18,000 membership roll in 1784, more than two hundred and fifty-five times—a record unprecedented.

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## II. FOREIGN MISSION FIELDS

### GROWTH IN COMMUNICANTS, 1911-1921

<i>Field</i>	<i>Date of Beginning Work</i>	<i>Total Number of Communi- cants in 1911</i>	<i>Total Number of Communi- cants in 1921</i>
China.....	1847	35,354	86,508
Japan (a).....	1873	.....	16,615
Korea.....	1885	25,026	19,985
India.....	1856	158,001	264,958
Philippine Islands	1885	34,933	65,323
Malaysia			
Netherlands Indies			
Africa (inc. North Africa)....	1833	11,606	21,320
Latin America (b).....	1836	16,919	20,985
Europe (c).....	1849	70,855	83,110
Totals.....		352,694	578,804

## III. THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH

When the division on the Plan of Separation was carried out in 1845 the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had 455,217 members. In 1846, when its first General Conference was held and more definite statistics were obtainable, there were 1,519 traveling preachers, 327,284 white, 124,961 colored and 2,972 Indian members, making a total of 458,050, not including itinerants. In 1850 there had been an advance to 520,526. Ten years later, 1860, the numbers had risen to 757,205, but the effects of the Civil War were disastrous, the losses reaching 246,044, partly due to loss of colored members and partly to the casualties of the conflict.

The recovery from war conditions was more rapid than could have been expected and prosperity soon returned not again to be interrupted. In 1920, as reported to the Ecumenical Conference of 1921, there were 7,664 traveling

(a) Representing only Missions of Methodist Episcopal Church in (United) Church of Japan.

(b) Including Mexico, Central and South America.

(c) Germany, Austria, Scandinavia, Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy, Czecho-Slovakia, Serbia, Bulgaria, etc.



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ministers, 4,701 local preachers, and 2,254,752 members, including the traveling preachers. The number of churches was 17,251, of Sunday schools 16,205, and of scholars 1,698,871. In 1922 the denomination had 7,970 ministers, 17,554 churches and 2,344,503 members, of whom 42,659 were in the foreign missions in Mexico, South America, Cuba, Africa, Korea and Japan.

### IV. THE METHODIST CHURCH OF CANADA

At the Christmas Conference in Baltimore was a preacher, James O. Cromwell, from Nova Scotia, who sought ordination, and a helper, Freeborn Garrettson, went back with him, both having been ordained and both appeared among the appointments. Jeremiah Lambert, of Antigua, West Indies, where Doctor Coke had begun, was also ordained, and thereafter for several years Antigua and Nova Scotia were on the list of appointments and were counted in the statistical report. In 1794 Upper Canada was noticed with 116 members and 1,316 were credited to Nova Scotia. Missionaries from England were in Nova Scotia before Garrettson went there. Afterward Upper Canada was accepted as the sphere of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and a considerable work was developed. But the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada found itself more or less hampered in its relations to the church in the United States and asked and received in 1828 its independence. Later, when various Methodist bodies in Canada united in one church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, with its Bishop Carman, disappeared as a separate organization.

Report made to the General Conference, in September, 1922, by General Superintendent Chown, showed that the church had 406,932 members, indicating an increase of about 19,000 during the quadrennium. All its interests were in a prosperous condition.

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## V. ECUMENICAL METHODISM AMERICAN AND ENGLISH BODIES IN 1920

<i>V. American Bodies</i>	<i>Itinerant Ministers</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Sunday Schools</i>	<i>Sunday School Scholars</i>
Methodist Episcopal.....	20,439	4,393,988	29,823	35,871	4,414,472
Methodist Episcopal, South....	7,664	2,254,752	17,251	16,205	1,698,871
Methodist of Canada.....	2,607	395,653	4,603	3,403	393,063
Methodist Protestant.....	1,450	179,500	2,288	1,903	152,521
African Methodist Episcopal...	6,550	551,776	6,900	6,250	278,313
African Methodist Episcopal Zion	3,456	458,734	3,434	2,092	107,692
Colored Methodist Episcopal...	2,402	267,361	3,285	2,560	170,027
Free Methodist.....	1,483	37,253	1,237	1,124	41,443
Wesleyan Methodist.....	590	21,000	675	505	21,463
Primitive Methodist.....	78	9,600	91	98	13,177
Congregational Methodist.....	500	21,000	352	182	8,785
New Congregational Methodist.	(a)27	(a)1,256	(a)24	(a)27	(a)1,298
Union American Methodist Epis- copal (Colored).....	220	21,016	281	192	5,076
African Union Methodist Prot- estant (Colored).....	600	20,000	575	66	5,266
Reformed Zion Union Apostolic (Colored).....	(a)53	(a)9,500	(a)53	(a)36	(a)1,508
Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal (Colored).....	51	1,726	29	54	1,792
Japan Methodist (United Na- tive) (e).....	230	22,000	337	583	38,108
British Methodist Episcopal (Colored) (c).....	(b)20	(b)700	(b)21	(b)18	.....
Total in 1920.....	48,420	8,666,815	71,259	71,169	7,352,875
Total in 1910.....	48,614	7,409,736	67,438	68,578	6,062,135
Increase for ten years...	(d)194	1,257,079	3,821	2,591	1,290,740
<i>VI. English Bodies</i>	<i>Ministers</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Sunday Schools</i>	<i>Sunday School Scholars</i>
Wesleyan Methodists:					
Great Britain.....	2,520	483,763	8,533	7,295	849,861
Ireland.....	248	27,245	545	327	22,188
Foreign Missions.....	655	217,096	3,740	2,454	146,054
French Conference.....	28	1,502	109	37	1,127
South African Conference....	270	145,153	4,285	914	41,363
Primitive Methodists.....	1,095	206,372	4,721	4,009	424,452
United Methodist Church.....	736	183,789	3,083	2,183	272,191
Wesleyan Reform Union.....	16	8,506	196	183	21,978
Independent Methodist Ch's...	380	9,185	159	159	25,172
Australasian Methodist Church.	1,102	179,215	4,450	4,000	210,000
New Zealand Methodist Church.	181	25,180	468	422	29,035
Total in 1920.....	7,231	1,487,006	30,289	21,983	2,043,421
Total in 1910.....	7,194	1,358,880	32,059	21,546	2,211,674
Increase for ten years...	37	128,126	(d)1,770	437	(d)168,253

(a) U. S. Census of 1916. (b) Returns of 1910. (c) Canada. (d) Decrease.  
(e) Native Church organized of missions of Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Episco-  
pal, South, and Canada Methodist Churches.

## FRANCIS ASBURY

### VI. SUMMARY OF AMERICAN AND ENGLISH BODIES

	<i>Itinerant Ministers</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Churches</i>	<i>Sunday Schools</i>	<i>Sunday School Scholars</i>
American Bodies. .	48,420	8,666,815	71,259	71,169	7,352,875
English Bodies. . .	7,231	1,487,006	30,289	21,983	2,043,421
Total in 1920. . .	55,651	10,153,821	101,548	93,152	9,396,296
Total in 1910. . .	55,808	8,768,616	99,497	90,124	8,273,809
Increase for ten years. . (d)157		1,385,205	2,051	3,028	1,122,487

### VII. ESTIMATE OF METHODIST POPULATION

American Bodies, members, probationers, and adherents. .	30,333,852
English Bodies, members, probationers, and adherents. . . .	7,435,030
Total. . . . .	37,768,882

NOTE.—The estimate for the English bodies is based on the ratio of four adherents to each member and probationer and for the American bodies on  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to each. Accordingly the multipliers are 5 and  $3\frac{1}{2}$  respectively.

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